

English Literature for Secondary Schools

General Editor :—J. H. FOWLER, M.A.

CHILDREN OF THE DAWN

PART II



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HERCULES WRESTLING WITH DEATH FOR THE BODY OF ALCESTIS.

After the Painting by Lord Leighton, *P.R.A.*

Children of the Dawn

Old Tales of Greece

Written by

Elsie Finnimore Buckley

*With Introduction by ARTHUR SIDGWICK; Notes and
Subjects for Essays by J. H. FOWLER*

PART II

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ILLUSTRATION

HERCULES WRESTLING WITH DEATH FOR THE BODY OF
 ALCESTIS. After the Painting by Lord Leighton,
P.R.A., - - - - - Frontispiece.

INTRODUCTION

[From the Introduction to the larger volume, comprising eleven stories, published by Messrs. Wells, Gardner, Darton & Co., Ltd., who have authorised the publication of the present selection]

THE aim of this volume is to present, in a form suitable for young readers, a small selection from the almost inexhaustible treasure-house of the ancient Greek tales, which abound (it is needless to say) in all Greek poetry, and are constantly referred to by the prose-writers. These stories are found, whether narrated at length, or sometimes only mentioned in a cursory and tantalising reference, from the earliest poets, Homer and Hesiod, through the lyric age, and the Attic renaissance of the fifth century, when they form the material of the tragic drama, down to the second century B.C., when Apollodorus, the Athenian grammarian, made a prose collection of them, which is invaluable. They reappear at Rome in the Augustan age (and later), in the poems of Vergil, Ovid, and Statius—particularly in Ovid's "Metamorphoses." Many more are supplied by Greek or Roman travellers, scholars, geographers, or historians, of the first three centuries of our era, such as Strabo, Pausanias, Athenæus, Apuleius and Ælian. The tales are various—stories of love, adventure, heroism, skill, endurance, achievement or defeat. The gods take active part, often in conflict with each other. The heroes or victims are men and women, and behind all, inscrutable and inexorable, sits the dark figure of Fate.

Whether the tales were of native growth, or imported from the East or elsewhere—and both sources are doubtless represented—once they had passed through the Greek hands, the Greek spirit, “finely touched to fine issues,” marked them for its own with the beauty, vivacity, dramatic interest, and imaginative outline and detail, which were never absent from the best Greek work, least of all during the centuries that lie between Homer and Plato.

The tales here presented from this vast store are (as will be seen) very various both in date, character, and detail; and they seem well chosen for their purpose. The writer of these English versions of ancient stories has clearly aimed at a terse simplicity of style, while giving full details, with occasional descriptive passages where required to make the scene more vivid; and, for the same end, she has rightly made free use of dialogue or soliloquy wherever the story could thus be more pointedly or dramatically told.

The story of *Alcestis* rests in large measure on the Attic drama. As far as we know, Euripides alone of the ancients treated this theme, in his beautiful and interesting play “*Alcestis*,” which is here closely followed by our author. The past history of *Admetus*, the king, which Euripides briefly summarises in the prologue, is here dramatized, and adds much interest to the story, including as it does the *Argonauts’* visit to *Pelias*, and the romantic imaginary scene of the king’s first meeting with *Alcestis*.

The fanciful story of *Echo* and *Narcissus* is among the prettiest of Nature myths, and a characteristic Greek invention. In its present form it comes only from Latin poetry (Ovid); but the fancy that *Echo* was a spirit or nymph, which is the heart of the story, may well be of unknown antiquity, especially among the most imaginative of races, living in a land of rocky hills, the native home of echoes.

it at the close of Vergil's fourth "Georgic," we know on good evidence to have been extant at least as early as Æschylus (fifth century B.C.), and possibly much earlier.

It only remains to commend these beautiful old stories, in their English dress, to the favour of those for whom they are intended

A. SIDGWICK.

OXFORD,
September 9, 1908.

CHILDREN OF THE DAWN

THE SACRIFICE OF ALCESTIS

I

ONCE upon a time when Pelias, the crafty king, ruled in Iolchos by the sea, his nephew Jason came and tried to win back from him the land that was his by right. But Pelias put him off with cunning words, and sent him forth to Colchis in search of the Golden Fleece, thinking that so he need never look upon his face again. Jason, therefore, who was brave and stout of heart, and feared not man nor beast, sent a proclamation through the land, bidding all who loved adventure to join him in the good ship *Argo*, and sail with him for the Golden Fleece. From the length and breadth of Hellas the heroes and sons of the Immortals flocked. Among them came Admetus of Pheræ, in the first bloom of his manhood; and sailing with the Argonauts, he braved all the terrors of that fearful voyage, and sat at his oar like a man in the midst of deadly peril.

After many a long day the remnant of the heroes who had sailed away from Iolchos returned with the

Golden Fleece; and standing before proud Pelias, they laid it at his feet. In the great hall of the palace he received them sitting on his throne: on his right hand sat Philomache his wife, and all about him stood his daughters, Peisidice and Asteropæa, Hippothoe, and Evadne, and Alcestis—maidens whose beauty would gladden any father's heart. But fairest of the fair, as the moon among stars, was Alcestis. When Admetus looked upon her face, his heart was filled with love for her, and he swore a great oath that he would live and die unwed, or else have Alcestis to wife.

When Pelias had welcomed back the Argonauts, he bid the henchmen spread the tables in the hall, and soon the king with his son Acastus and all the menfolk were seated with the heroes round the well-filled board. Against a pillar leant a minstrel, who sang of great deeds and heroes, and how the good ship *Argo* had braved the terrors of the seas; while the daughters of Pelias bore round the sweet dark wine in flagons, and filled up the golden goblets. To Alcestis it fell to fill up the cup of Admetus, and as he held it out towards her their eyes met, and she blushed beneath his gaze, and tried to hide her confusion in the folds of her veil. She was vexed with herself for the blush and vexed with him for having called it forth. Yet withal her heart beat fast, and the beating of it was not altogether born of wrath; for Admetus was a proper man in the prime of life, who had sailed the high seas and seen danger face to face, and a brave

man's admiration is ever dear to a woman's heart. So it came to pass that when Admetus drew from his breast a lock of the Golden Fleece, which Jason had given him for a memorial, and held it forth to her, she refused it not, but took and hid it in the folds of her gown, and when Admetus was gone away she would draw it forth and sigh as she looked at it.

When Admetus saw that she did not altogether disdain him, he was glad at heart, and plucked up all his courage, and went and stood before the king her father, and boldly asked her hand in marriage. As he spoke the king's brow darkened, for he loved not Jason nor any of his crew. He had sent them forth, as he thought, to their death, and now they were come home to wrest the kingdom from him and give it to the lawful heir. So he cast about in his mind for some excuse; for Admetus was nobly born, and heir to a great kingdom, and he could not say him nay without good reason. In his trouble he bethought him of an ancient oracle which a soothsayer had spoken when Alcestis lay a babe upon her mother's breast. Till now he had put aside all thought of it, and had looked upon the seer as a mad prophet whose words were of no account. But now that they would serve him in his need, he pretended that he had always laid them up in his heart, and intended to abide by them.

"Young man," he said, "they who would woo my child Alcestis must woo and win her as the

gods have ordered. When she lay in her mother's arms, there came a prophet and stood over her and spake, saying, 'Child of evil fortune! whosoever thou weddest, woe to thy wedded life, sobeit thy lord come not to bear thee away in a chariot drawn by a lion and a boar.' Thus spake the prophet of the gods, and his words shall surely come to pass. Think not, then, that I will give my daughter up to misery, or that thou hast but to look on her beauty and long for her, to have her for thine own. Nay; hence, away, and bethink thee how thou canst so beguile a lion's heart that he shall walk tamely in the yoke beside his lawful prey. Then, and then only, when thou comest driving this strange pair shalt thou have Alcestis for thy wife."

Admetus was sad at heart when he heard the king's words, and he set out sorrowfully home for the halls of Pheres, his father; for he thought that this thing was beyond the power of mortal man to do, and that all his life long he must live in loneliness of soul, without Alcestis to wife.

When they heard of their son's return, Pheres and Periclymene, his wife, came forth to greet him, and fell upon his neck and embraced him with tears of joy. A great feast was prepared, and the altars of the gods sent up to heaven the savoury smoke of sacrifice, and all the people rejoiced together at the return of the hero their land had sent forth.

After all the feasting and merrymaking was ended, Pheres drew his son aside to his chamber and said,

"My son, whilst thou hast been away in strange lands the hand of Time hath dealt heavily with me. My knees are weak beneath me, my hair is white with age, and all my strength is gone. Year by year it groweth harder for me to ride forth among my people, and the folk on the far boundary know my face no more, and I cannot say whether all is well with them. Time is it for me to give my crown and sceptre to a younger man, and thou hast shown thyself worthy to rule. Take now the kingdom from my hand, that thy mother and I may pass our last years in peace together. A mighty kingdom have I builded up for thee, and worthy of mighty kings. See to it, then, that thou take to wife some princess of a royal house and rear up a son to rule the land when thou art dead."

And Admetus answered,

"The kingdom will I take from thee right gladly, my father, and rule it well and wisely so long as the gods shall give me strength. But as to taking a wife in my halls, that I can never do."

Then he told him of his love for Alcestis, and how he could never hope to win her. But his father laughed and shook his head.

"'Tis the way of hot-headed youth to think that in all the wide world one woman alone hath a fair face and bright eyes. Time and the beauty of another woman shall heal thy malady, never fear."

"Time and another woman may drive me to my death," he answered hotly, "but never will I wed with any maid save Alcestis alone, whom I love."

And he strode in anger from the room. But Pheres laughed the louder.

"Verily, young blood is the same the whole world through," said he.

So Admetus became King of Pheræ, and ruled in his father's stead; and from the shores of the sea below Pelion to the land of the Molossians, the mountain-folk of the Far West, his name was held in honour among his people; for the land had peace in his day, and the valleys stood thick with corn, and by the fair-flowing waters of Boëbe the shepherd played his pipes, and his flocks wandered browsing about the green meadows. No stranger was ever turned away from the palace doors, but, however poor and ragged he might be, he was welcomed right gladly, and feasted in the halls and sped upon his way with kindly words. So it came to pass that through the length and breadth of Hellas, when men spoke of good cheer and hospitality, they always raised the cup in honour of Admetus, the kindest of hosts to rich and poor alike.

II

One day as Admetus sat at meat in the great hall with his parents and all the household, a thing befell which changed the course of his whole life. Inside the fire burnt brightly on the hearth, and the torches on the walls sent a cheerful gleam through the shadowy vastness. But outside the wind howled about the corners of the palace like

Furies in their wrath, and anon it sunk down to a sob and a wail, while the lashing of the rain against the walls was as the whip of a furious driver urging on his steeds. And lo! from out the darkness of the storm there came a man, who stood in the doorway of the great hall and looked round about upon the company. Many a long mile must he have come that day in the teeth of the gale, for from head to foot he was splashed with mud, and the water ran from his ragged cloak in streamlets, making a pool upon the floor. In his hand he carried a staff; from a strap about his body hung a strange instrument such as no man in the hall had ever seen before, and he held his head up proudly and looked fearlessly about him, so that for all his sorry raiment he seemed no common beggar, but a young king in all his pride. A hush fell upon the people as they gazed, for his eyes shone strangely bright, and in the darkness of the shadowy doorway his stature seemed greater than that of mortal man. When he had looked his fill and saw where Admetus sat, he strode across the hall with great swinging strides, and came and stood before him. As he walked the people looked silently after him, for a great ship running before the wind was not more fair than he.

“O king,” he said, and his voice rang clear and mellow through the hall, “a suppliant I stand before thee, and my hand is red with blood. Say, wilt thou receive me in thy halls, or wilt thou turn me forth into the storm and darkness?”

And Admetus marvelled at his words.

"Who art thou, stranger, to make this bold request? When a man's hand is stained with blood, 'tis to the altars of the gods that he should fly for cleansing, and not bring pollution to the palaces of kings."

"My name it behoveth thee not to know now, nor the deed I have done. Let it suffice thee when I say that not yet have the altars of that god been built who hath the power to cleanse me from blood-guiltiness. Nay, myself I must work out mine own cleansing, and for the waxing and the waning of twelve moons it is decreed that I must serve a mortal man. Wilt thou take me for thine herdsman—yea or nay?"

At this Admetus marvelled the more, and looked hard in the face of the stranger, but his eyes fell beneath the other's fearless gaze as those of a dog beneath his master's; and he answered him never a word, for he felt that the thought of his heart lay writ beneath that piercing look as clear as writing on a tablet. So he signed to his attendants, and they led the stranger forth and bathed him in warm water, and anointing him, clad him in fresh sweet linen and a tunic of silk. When all was accomplished, they led him back to the hall, and if the people had marvelled before at his beauty, their wonder was increased twofold as they gazed at him now.

When he had taken his fill of meat and wine, the stranger turned to Admetus and said,

"My noble host, fain would I, in some poor measure, requite thee and thy household for kindness to a wanderer and a suppliant. I have some small skill in song, and have fashioned me an instrument whereon I play sweet harmonies, that frame the melody of my song like the golden setting of a gem. Have I thy leave to sing before thee in thy halls?"

As Admetus bowed his head the stranger loosed the curious instrument from his girdle. The body of it was the hollow shell of a tortoise, in the rim of which two twisted horns were cunningly fitted, joined together towards the top by a silver band. The space between the band and the furthestmost edge of the shell was spanned by seven strings of gold. Lovingly he drew his fingers across the strings, and the chords rang soft and true through the silence of the hall, as he played a prelude to his song, and anon raised his voice and sang. He sang a strange, sweet song, such as no man there had ever heard, and yet in the depths of his soul each one of them felt that he had known it before he was born. For the song that the stranger sang was the song that the stars first sang together when the universe was born, and light sprang forth from the darkness. The melody they made that day vibrates for ever till the end of time. Musicians and artists and poets, and those whom the gods love, hear it and sing it, each in his separate way, for those who have forgotten the sound of it. Deep in the heart of every man it lies voiceless, till once at least in

his lifetime the hand of the divine musician sets the chords vibrating, and opens the ears of the soul to hear the heavenly harmonies. Such was the song that the stranger sang, and the people sat breathless beneath his spell, and gazing deep into the red-hot heart of the fire, saw strange dreams and visions. The very dogs awoke from their sleep, and crept closer to the music, and with their heads between their paws, gazed with unblinking eyes at the singer, and a magic thrill ran round the circle of them that listened, both man and beast, and welded and fused their souls in one, so that they felt that the life in them all was the same. When the song was ended, silence fell upon all things—even the storm outside had ceased to rage; and Time stood still as each man sat motionless in his seat, with heart too full for speech. But at length the spell was broken, and with a sigh and a whisper, they glided away to their rest, till Admetus and the stranger were left face to face before the hearth.

“O divine musician,” said Admetus, “I know not who thou art. This only do I know, that I could worship thee for the godlike beauty of thy song, and follow thee and serve thee all my days.”

“Nay, O king; ’tis destined that I must serve thee, and be thy servant for a year. To-morrow I will lay aside this silken doublet, and put on the dress that suits my station, and go forth with the other shepherds of thy flocks.”

“ O stranger, this thing can never be. Who am I that thou shouldst be my servant ? ”

“ Thou art the man who turneth not the stranger from thy doors, though his hands, like mine, be red with blood. As for me, I must work out my cleansing, as I told thee. For blood-guiltiness is mine, though I have not sinned in the shedding thereof. But even Zeus himself, thou knowest, hath not reached wisdom and might, save by sore struggle against powers less wise than he. Happy am I if by the service of an upright man I may be purified.”

From that day forth the stranger became a herdsman in the halls of Admetus, and in no wise would he be treated differently from the other servants. Clad in the coarse, rough homespun of a shepherd, he would go forth at early dawn with the flocks, and at eventide return and sit among his fellows at the lower table. The hearts of all the household were warmed towards him, and it seemed that in his presence no evil thing could live ; for if ever a quarrel or strife of tongues arose, a look from the stranger would take all the spirit from the combatants, and the matter fell dead between them like a ball at the feet of listless players—nay, it seemed that he could read the very thoughts of their inmost hearts, and all malice and unkindness withered away in the sunshine of his presence, like sprigs that have no root. Strange tales were told of how he shepherded his flocks, for the shepherd lads who went forth with him at dawn would lie at

his feet in some shady grove whilst the flocks browsed close at hand, and he would take his lyre and sing to them of all things in heaven and earth, and at the sound of his voice the hearts of all living things were moved. From the rocky heights of Othrys the lion came down and fawned at his feet with bloodless fangs, and the spotted lynxes gambolled with the flocks. The shy fawns forgot their fears and left the shelter of the tall pine-woods, and danced about his lyre with fairy feet; for the magic of his singing made the whole world kin, and the bow and the arrow were laid aside in those days, and no watchman stood upon the heights to guard the herds from beasts of prey. But the flocks increased and multiplied, and the earth brought forth rich harvests of corn and fruit, and all the land had peace. So Admetus loved and honoured his strange herdsman above all his fellows, and took counsel with him, and followed his advice in all things.

III

Meanwhile in Iolchos by the sea the old king Pelias had died. His son Acastus succeeded to his throne, and, as the custom was, held great games in honour of his father. Far and wide through Hellas he sent the news, and bade all men of might come and take part in the contests of running and wrestling and hurling the quoit. To the victors in each trial he offered to give one of his sisters in

marriage, but for Alcestis he made the contest doubly hard, for she was the fairest and noblest of the daughters of Pelias, and he knew that the suitors would flock without number for her hand if the task that was set them was not well-nigh impossible. So he ordained that he who would win her must prove himself the mightiest of all men in the field that day, and that, moreover, he must come to bear away his bride in a chariot drawn by a lion and a boar; for so the king, her father, had ordered in obedience to the words of the prophet.

When Admetus heard the news, the fire of his love for Alcestis burst forth into flame, and he felt that he could conquer the whole world to win her. When he went to rest that night he could dream of nought but her, and of how all men would marvel when they saw him come to bear her away in a chariot drawn by a lion and a boar. How he was to train this strange yoke-pair he knew not, but he felt that Alcestis was not one whom the gods had fated to live unwedded all her days. From the length and breadth of Hellas men would flock to woo her, and surely from all the host one would be found to do this deed, and why should he not be that one? So he argued, and dreamed sweet dreams of love and happiness. But,—whether it be that sweet dreams take the heart from a man, because in sleep they put within his grasp visions which, on waking, he finds to be but shadows of a shade, and he longs to clasp them once again without the labour and toil

which alone on earth can bring man happiness,—certain it is that when he awoke Admetus felt that the task was hopeless, and that all his efforts would be vain. His heart was in a tumult; his longing for Alcestis was as strong as ever, but the confidence of winning her was gone. He went out into the woodland and threw himself on the grass beside the stream and gazed moodily into the dark depths of a pool. Its silent stillness so maddened him that he cast a pebble into the midst, and watched it as it slowly sank, feeling that it was an image of his own life. An hour or more he sat there idly playing with the pebbles and the water, heavy at heart, and a prey to morbid fancies. At length he was roused from his dreaming by the sound of music far away. Slowly it drew nearer, and from the shadow of the trees came the strange herdsman playing on his lyre, followed by his flocks and the wild creatures of the forest. Without a word he came and sat beside Admetus at the water's edge, and the animals lay grouped around. Then he changed the key of his song from a merry dance-tune to a solemn lay, and the burden of his song was love—how love, if it were but strong and pure, could conquer the whole world and accomplish deeds undreamt of. As Admetus listened, the tumult of his heart was stilled, and once again the flower of hope sprang up in his breast—not the phantom flower that springs from idle dreams, but the bright living flower whose roots are firmly planted in the will to do and dare all things to win the promised prize.

When the herdsman had ended his song, he laid aside his lyre and gazed at Admetus.

"Dost thou love this maiden with all thy heart and soul, Admetus?" he asked.

"I would face the whole world to win her," said he.

"Wouldst thou lay down thy life for her?"

"Why ask so poor a sacrifice? My life without her would be a thing of nought."

Again the herdsman gazed at him, and seemed to read his inmost soul.

"In sooth, I verily believe that, were death now to face thee, thou wouldst gladly die for her. Go forth, then, and win thy bride, and I will help thee all I can. If thou fulfil the first part of the test, I will see to it that thou fail not in the second."

"Master," cried Admetus, "what meanest thou?"

"Go thou and enter the lists for Alcestis, and show thyself the best man in the field that day. When they hail thee victor, and bid thee come to fetch away thy bride, as her father willed, answer boldly that the next day at noon thou wilt come in a chariot drawn by a lion and a boar to bear her away to thine own land. Then do thou hasten alone to the wood that lies on the road to Pheræ, five miles from Iolchos, and there, by the temple of Hecate, wilt thou find me and the chariot ready harnessed. Believest thou that I can do this thing?"

"O master, do I not see before me the lion lying tamely by the sheep and the wolf by the side of the lamb? How can I doubt thy power?"

“ So be it, then. One word of counsel would I give thee : in the day of thy triumph forget not the gods.”

“ From my youth upwards have I honoured the gods, O stranger. How, then, in the day of my triumph, should I forget them ? ”

“ May they deliver thee in the hour of thy wealth, Admetus, and save thee from blindness and hardness of heart ! Above all, when thou art coming home with thy bride, beware lest in thy haste thou pass by the altar of Hecate without the tribute of a prayer. Mighty is the goddess, and in her hands are life and death. The sun with his glad warm rays shines down upon the bosom of the earth, and draws forth the young corn from her breast, and with loving hand he paints the purple bloom of the grape. But when summer skies are cloudless, and the breath of the breeze smites hot upon the land, men pray for rain and the cooling veil of mists to hide the parched and thirsty fields from the cruel shafts of his rays. Even so is the might of Hecate ; in one hand she hath a blessing, in the other a curse. She may stand beside thy wife in the hour of her need, and bring thy children with joy into the world (for the life of all young things she loveth) ; or if she be slighted, she can blast the parent-stock ere it hath time to bear fruit, and cut off the fair promise of the race.”

“ Surely I will not forget her,” said Admetus.

“ An hour before noon, then, on the day after the contest of the suitors, I will await thee in the wood. May the gods speed thee in thy trial ! ”

IV

On the day before the games were to be held Alcestis went on to the roof of the palace, and looked down upon the great courtyard below. All was bustle and confusion. The bronze gates stood wide upon their hinges, and a stream of people passed to and fro. The chariots of the suitors thundered across the pavement. Through the colonades re-echoed the clattering of horses' hoofs and the clanging of harness chains, and from his post at the gateway the warder shouted his orders to the pages and attendants. Far out across the country Alcestis gazed and traced the white roadway where it wound over the bosom of the plain. He for whom she was looking had not entered the courtyard, and she strained her eyes to see whether, among all the folk who were wending their way towards the city, she could find him. But the palace stood high upon the hill, with the houses of the town nestling below, and the folk upon the road were like flies, so small and black they seemed upon the dusty highway. Many a long hour she watched upon the roof, and still he came not. At length the sun went down behind the mountains in a glory of crimson and gold, and the purple hills cast their shadow across the silent plain. Then Alcestis laid her head upon her arm, and great tears stole through her fingers, and fell upon the cold stone parapet.

"Ah me, the gods are cruel!" she sobbed. "They

have planted the seed of love within my heart, and now they would have me tear it out. Hard is a woman's lot. In bitterness of soul she sits within, whilst out in the great world men fight for her beauty, as though she were some painted image or lifeless weight of gold. On the slipping of a foot or the cast of a die her fate may rest for weal or woe, and the happiness of her life hang upon the issue of a moment."

Then she felt in her bosom for the lock of the Golden Fleece which Admetus had given her, and drew it forth and kissed it.

"Alas, he has forgotten me! He is a great king now, and thinks no more of the maiden in whose eyes he looked when he first came back from his voyage."

Sadly she put the lock back in her bosom, and turned and went down the turret-stair. It was close upon the hour when all the suitors were to be feasted in the great hall, and with her sisters she was to sing the pæan song at the pouring of the third libation. Full often had she sung it in her father's halls; for only unwedded maidens, pure and innocent of soul, might sing it, and ask for blessings on their home and kindred, and return thanks to great Zeus, the saviour, for the gladness of a well-filled board and the happy faces of friends and kinsfolk round the hearth. Her heart was heavy within her when she thought that now for the last time this task would be hers, and that only one more sun would set before she would be far away in a strange land, the wife of

a man whose very name she knew not yet. Her one hope lay in the words of the prophet and the will of her father, that she should wed that man only who could come to bear her away in a chariot drawn by a lion and a boar, and from the depths of her soul she prayed that all might find the task impossible.

"Better to die a maiden," she thought, "than to be the prize of a man I do not love."

As she reached the bottom of the stair she heard her sisters calling.

"Alcestis, Alcestis, where art thou? The feast is well-nigh finished, and all men wait for us to sing the pæan song. Tarry no longer, but hasten and come."

"I come, I come," she answered. "Yet the song of joy upon my lips will echo like a dirge through the chambers of my soul."

And the sisters marvelled at her, and shook their heads.

"She hath always wayward fancies," they whispered, "and is different from other folk."

Their hearts were a-flutter with hope and joy, for on the morrow they would each one be wedded to a brave man, and go to a strange new land, and be queens in their own palaces. So they took no heed of her words, but tripped along the galleries with joyful feet, and took their places in the crowded hall. After them came Alcestis. Slowly, and with sad, unseeing eyes, she took her seat beside them.

Meanwhile Admetus had tarried alone outside the city walls. He had sent his servants before him

with his chariot and his gear to secure a stabling for his horses and a sleeping-place for himself in the crowded alcoves of the king's palace. But his soul longed for peace and quiet, and he felt he could not face the noisy crowd before it was needful. Time enough if he slipped into the great hall when the company was gathering for the feast. Only then might he hope to see Alcestis. So he turned aside into the quiet fields and wandered by the winding stream. Behind him the dust rose in white clouds from the high-road as the chariots of the suitors thundered up towards the palace, and Admetus knew that many a brave and mighty hero would stand against him on the morrow. Yet hope burned high in his heart, and he felt that his love for Alcestis was a power which his rivals lacked—a power which would nerve his arm and give him the strength of ten. The desire of his heart went up to the throne of Zeus like the breath of a good man's prayer; and Zeus heard the cry of his soul, and into his veins he poured of that fire which runs in the veins of the Immortals. On earth men know not what to call it, and they name it with many names—inspiration, genius, and the spirit of prophecy, or, when it works too far beyond their understanding, they call it madness.

As the sun was sinking low in the sky, Admetus turned up the steep roadway to the palace. In the courtyard he found his servants, and they brought him water to wash with, and a change of raiment, and clothed him as befitted one who had come to woo a

fair princess. As the shades of evening fell he entered the great hall, and mingled with the company, and when the tables were spread, he took his seat among the rest. But when his neighbour spoke to him, he would answer at random, and ever his eye wandered restlessly up and down the hall to find Alcestis. Now the feast drew to its close, and yet no womenfolk appeared. At last one of the serving-men drew aside the great curtain that hung across the doorway, and as the daughters of Pelias entered Admetus felt his heart leap in his bosom, and he leant eagerly across the table. The moments that passed before Alcestis came seemed eternity, and when at length she entered, her eyes were cast upon the floor, and she saw him not. But when she had taken her seat, the silent voice of his soul sped across the great hall, and found an echo in her heart, and she raised her eyes and looked at him, and for one moment they two were alone in that crowded place.

And now the wine was mixed, and each man held out his cup for the pouring of the third libation. Then Alcestis rose from her seat, and her sisters played a prelude on their pipes. When the prelude was ended she raised her voice and sang.

“O all-bestowing Zeus, Father Almighty, for the mercies thou hast showered upon us, for the evil thou hast warded off, lo, with thankful hearts we make libation of the sweet dark wine! O friend of the stranger, who searchest out the secrets of men’s hearts, midst the whirlwind rush of the chariots and the dust of the wrestling-ring, stand thou beside

the brave man and the true! Make firm his axle-pin, and the earth beneath him sure, and chain blind Fortune's hands. So shall the prize fall to the most valiant. To those whose lives must be moulded by another's will, grant thou patience and an understanding soul, O Lord, and may the desire of their heart be according to thy will. O father of gods and men, cloud-enthroned, who ridest on the wings of the whirlwind, joy and sorrow by thee are blended into one harmonious whole. By the sunshine of thy mercy, by the scorching fire of thy wrath, open thou the blinded eyes of men to see the glory of thy works. All hail to thee, saviour and king most high!"

As she sang the people marvelled, for her voice was as the voice of some priestess of the gods filled with the breath of heaven.

When the feast was ended, the pages took down the torches from the walls, and led forth the guests to the shadowy alcoves where each man's couch was laid, and there was silence in the halls. On noiseless wings Sleep glided through the palace, and stood by each man's side. With gentle hands she soothed his weary limbs, and put fresh courage in his heart for the contest of the morrow. But when she came to Alcestis she found her gazing out upon the star-lit sky.

"My daughter," she said, "come to my arms and lay thy head upon my breast, and I will ease the trouble of thine heart."

"Ah, sweet Sleep, not to-night," Alcestis answered,

"for with Zeus a mortal's fervent prayer availeth much. I cannot stand beside Admetus in the lists, but at least he shall not fail for want of a true heart's prayer to-night."

So Sleep passed her by, and till the bright-haired dawn shone out in the east Alcestis sat by the open window. When it was light she went to rouse her sisters, for early in the morning they were to lead the procession of the maidens to the temples of the gods and lay wreaths and garlands before the shrines, while the men-folk gathered in the plain to watch the contest of the suitors.

"But one more sun shall set, O king, before Alcestis shall be my bride. To-morrow at noon will I come to bear her away in a chariot drawn by a lion and a boar."

And those who heard him marvelled at his confidence.

V

The next day towards noon the king came forth and sat upon a throne in the portico before the palace, and all the nobles and suitors stood round about and waited to see if Admetus would fulfil his word. As the sun stood high in the heavens there fell upon his ears a sound like the moaning of the sea far away when a storm is at hand. Louder and louder it grew, drawing nearer every moment, till at length, like the break of a mighty wave, a host of cheering citizens surged through the great

the sea. Never since the day when all the heroes gathered at the call of Jason for the search of the Golden Fleece had there been such a goodly concourse of men in fair Iolchos. From all the wide plain of Thessaly they flocked, from hill-girt Attica and the Spartan lowlands, from Argolis and the green valleys of Arcadia, and from the isles of the sea.

All the day long the people sat and watched the games, and ever and anon a shout went up to heaven when a strong man overthrew his adversary, or one swift of foot passed the others in the last lap of the race. There was hurling of quoits, and leaping and glory of thy works. All hail to thee, saviour and king most high ! ”

As she sang the people marvelled, for her voice was as the voice of some priestess of the gods filled with the breath of heaven.

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“ My daughter,” she said, “ come to my arms and lay thy head upon my breast, and I will ease the trouble of thine heart.”

“ Ah, sweet Sleep, not to-night,” Alcestis answered,

king placed the crown of leaves upon his head and said,

“In token that thou hast proved thyself the mightiest in the field, I place this garland on thine head, Admetus. Verily, the gods have stood upon thy side and filled thee with the fire of heaven, so that the strength of thine adversary was turned to weakness before thy might. May they grant thee, in like way, to fulfil the last part of the task; for, of a truth, it would grieve me to see one so mighty depart without a prize.”

Then Admetus answered boldly.

“But one more sun shall set, O king, before Alcestis shall be my bride. To-morrow at noon will I come to bear her away in a chariot drawn by a lion and a boar.”

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bronze gates. Into the wide courtyard they poured, and then stood back upon either side, and, up the alley in the midst, drove Admetus in a chariot drawn by a lion and a boar. Straight across the court he came, and, like well-trained steeds, the beasts looked neither to right nor left, nor heeded the cheers of the people. With a jingling of bells and the rattle of harness-chains, they trotted between the ranks, and came and stood before the king.

"I have kept my word, O king, and have come to bear away my bride, as the prophet of the gods ordained."

Then the king rose up and greeted Admetus.

"Right glad am I to see thee, Admetus," he cried, "and right glad that my sister shall be thy bride. May the gods bless thy wedded life, even as they have blessed thy suit this day!"

Thereupon the pages threw open the palace doors, and a chorus of maidens came forth playing upon pipes, and singing a marriage hymn. Last of all came Alcestis, clad in the saffron robes of a bride, and to Admetus she seemed like the sun heralded by the stars of dawn. Gently he took her hand and raised her into the car, and the people piled rich tapestries and vessels of gold and silver beside them for gifts of marriage. With a shouting and waving of hands the chariot passed once more across the court and down through the echoing streets, till at length they two were alone upon the white highway. The joy that was

born of their hearts threw a magic light on all the land. The green grass waved in the meadows, the leaves danced gaily on the trees, and from the thickets and bushes the birds sang songs of gladness. On and on they drove, as in a dream, heeding neither time nor distance. The glare of the dusty highway changed to the shade of the woodland path, with green arches overhead, and a murmur of dancing streams. Before the shrine of Hecate a shepherd had placed his offering, and was standing with his hands held high in prayer. But Admetus heeded neither shepherd nor shrine, nor remembered when last he had stood there and taken his strange team from his herdsman. Without a thought he passed the altar by. As the gleaming chariot grew dim in the distance, the shepherd turned and watched it, till the curve of the road hid it from sight. Even then he stood and listened to the jingling of the bells, as though he thought that still it might turn back. But the bells grew fainter and fainter, till he heard but a tinkle now and again borne back on the wings of the wind, and at last he could hear that no more. Sadly he turned back, and stood again before the shrine with outstretched hands, then silently disappeared into the depths of the wood.

On went the two till the shades of night began to fall, and one by one the stars came out in the sky. Now they drew near to Pheræ. High up upon the hill the palace gleamed

bright with many a torch, for messengers had gone before to say that Admetus was coming with his bride, and all the folk had gathered together to greet him on his return. As they entered the city gates choruses of men and maidens came forth to meet them, and up the steep hill the glad procession wound, with the singing of hymns and playing of pipes. When they reached the palace gates the maidens raised Alcestis in their arms, and bore her over the brazen threshold, that no evil omen might befall her as she entered her new home. Long and merry was the marriage-feast, and ere it was over the night was far spent. But at length the last libation had been poured, the last cup had passed round the board, and the maidens stood waiting to take Alcestis to the marriage chamber. So she rose and went with them, and they decked her in the robes in which for the first time a young bride greets her lord. When all was ready, they took down the torches from the walls, and left her. Outside the door they formed in chorus to sing the love-song till Admetus should come to his bride.

Not long did they wait. With eager steps he came and drew aside the curtain from the doorway. In the middle of the chamber stood Alcestis, and never had she looked more fair. As the sweet notes of the love-song stole softly through the door, she held out her arms to Admetus. Her hair fell in a cloud about her shoulders, and her white robe touched the floor. From the casement the

pale moonbeams fell slanting down, and cast about her a halo of light. With the silver shimmer of her hair and the gleam of her outstretched arms, she seemed to Admetus a messenger of the gods come down by the ladder of light. With a cry of joy he stepped towards her. As he did so a terrible thing befell. Between him and his bride there rose up two huge serpents, and as he rushed towards them they circled Alcestis about in their gleaming coils. The nearer he drew the more closely did they clasp her, and their forked tongues flashed like lightning about her head.

"Back, back!" she gasped, "or they will strangle me."

Unconsciously he fell back. As he did so the great beasts relaxed their grip, and fell down in shining coils upon the floor, but their heads waved to and fro above the ground, and when once more he took a step forward, they rose up again about her with an angry hiss.

"Oh, leave me, leave me!" cried Alcestis. "The gods are angry, and will not let thee touch me. Fight not against their will, or the serpents will slay me."

"Nay, with these hands will I strangle them," cried Admetus.

Again he rushed forward, and again, before he could cross the room, the monsters had wound themselves about Alcestis with a clasp of iron, so that she could scarcely breathe. Just in time Admetus drew back, or they would have squeezed

the life from her. With a groan he turned and fled from the room, and the love-song changed to a shriek of terror as the maidens scattered this way and that before him. With head bowed down and wide eyes full of horror, he staggered on like a drunken man, and disappeared into the darkness of the silent hall. In terror the maidens clung together, with whisperings like the twitter of frightened birds. At length one more bold than her companions drew aside the curtain from the door and looked into the chamber. Full in the path of the moonbeams Alcestis lay stretched upon the floor. Her eyes were closed, and her face was pale as with the paleness of death. Yet there seemed nothing in the room that should have caused her to swoon away. The maiden called to her companions, and together they lifted Alcestis upon the couch, and ministered to her, till at length she opened her eyes.

Admetus meanwhile had rushed through the deserted hall and out into the moonlit court. All was quiet, save for one solitary figure, who walked up and down in the shadow of the colonnade. As Admetus staggered across the court, the man came out and stood across his path.

"Whither goest thou, O king?" he asked.

Raising his eyes, Admetus found himself face to face with his strange herdsman.

"My head burns from feasting in the crowded hall," he said, "and I am come out to get the cool night air."

The herdsman answered him never a word, but gazed at him with his strange piercing eyes. And Admetus glanced this way and that, but could not meet that steadfast look.

"Why do the gods torment me?" he cried hotly. "What have I done that I should be tortured on my bridal night?"

"Nay, think rather what thou hast left undone."

"Left undone?" cried Admetus, and pointed to the altar in the centre of the court. "Seest thou not the fire still red from the burning of the sacrifice? Not here only, but throughout the whole city, do they steam with the savoury smoke."

"Altars may steam while hearts are cold, Admetus. One fervent prayer before the solitary shrine availeth more than hecatombs of oxen slain without a thought. Did I not stand before thee in the path this day and lift my hands in prayer to Hecate? But with unseeing eyes didst thou pass me by, and the goddess is wroth at thy neglect, and her anger standeth between thee and thy bride."

And Admetus stood with eyes downcast before him, and had never a word to say.

"Yet because I love thee I will help thee once again," the herdsman said. "Go back upon thy road and offer now thy prayers. I too will intercede for thee, and methinks that the voice of my pleadings she will not disdain."

Slowly and sorrowfully did Admetus return along the road he had travelled with so light a heart before. For three days and three nights he was not

seen within the palace, and for three days and three nights Alcestis lay tossing to and fro upon her bed, with wild words upon her lips, and before her eyes fearful shapes that she alone could see. On the fourth day Admetus came slowly up the hill. The dust of the highway clung white about his clothes, and the sweat of weariness stood out upon his brow. Yet straightway he came and stood beside Alcestis, and took her hand in his. Then she opened her eyes and looked at him, and for the first time since her marriage night she gazed on a face with eyes that could see. The fearful shapes and visions fled away, and she smiled at him with tears of joy. Then Admetus knew that his prayers had not been vain, and that Hecate had heard his cry, and given him back his wife.

VI

Quickly the days and nights sped by, and the palace was full of joy and happiness. At last the season came round that had brought the strange herdsman to Admetus the year before. On the self-same day of the month he came and stood once more before him.

"Twelve moons have waxed and waned, O king," he said, "since the day when first thou gavest me shelter in thy halls. The time of my cleansing is accomplished, and I am come to bid thee farewell."

"Farewell?" cried Admetus. "That is a bitter word in mine ears. Fain would I have thee with me always. Yet have I no heart to beg thee to

remain, for thou art mightier than I, and even to call thee guest and friend would sound presumptuous in mine ears. Farewell, then. May the gods reward thee tenfold for the blessings thou hast showered upon my house !”

“When first I stood within thy halls thou didst say to me, ‘Stranger, who art thou, and whose blood is on thy hands?’ Dost thou not ask me that question now once more ere we part?”

“Master, I asked it then in ignorance of thee and of thy ways. To-day it lieth with thee to tell me or not as thou wilt. If thou wouldst hide thy name from me still, I am content.”

“Nay, I will tell thee, for ’tis meet thou shouldst know. The fame of the deed I wrought has spread far and wide throughout the world wherever men speak with awe the name of Delphi. Thou knowest how in the beginning Earth held the sacred shrine, and gave forth, from the mouth of her priestess, dark and dreadful oracles, and Chaos and Night had their seats there, and the wingless foul Furies, the trackers of blood. Round about the awful spot the mountains re-echoed the voice of lamentation and the cries of human victims led forth to sacrifice; and lest at any time one strong of arm and stout of heart should come to wrest away the shrine from the powers of darkness, there lay before the gates a guardian fierce and terrible—Python, the sleepless dragon. In and out and round about the portals he wound his monstrous length, and his scales threw back the light like points of flashing

steel, and his eyes were like the red-tongued flame. No man in those days could pass that dreadful portal, but, like a dim, uncertain echo, the voice of the priestess floated down to the trembling folk below. At last one day there came a shining one whose sword was the sunlight, and his arrows were darts of living fire. With the strength of his right arm he slew the Python, and stretched out his monstrous coils beneath the hot sun's rays, till the flesh melted and rotted away, and only his bones lay gleaming white upon the rocks, to show how once he had guarded the shrine against all comers; and the victor took the shrine and made it his own, and placed his priestess there to utter forth true oracles to men when the divine spirit filled her breast. The waters of the Castalian spring he purified, so that those who came might wash away their guilt, and stand with pure hearts before the shrine. And over the green lawns beneath Parnassus he led the choir of the Muses, the bright-haired sisters of poetry, and music, and dancing. Because their feet have touched the earth where Castalia has its fount, men say that those who drink of those waters are filled with their spirit, so that the words that they speak and the songs that they sing are immortal, and will live for ever upon the lips and in the hearts of men. He who did this thing and turned the darkness into light stands here before thee now."

"Apollo!" cried Admetus, "lord and master!" And he fell upon the ground before him, and clasped

him by the knees. "Ah, forgive the blindness and presumption of my heart!" he begged.

"Nay, there is nought to forgive. They that shed blood must pay the price—yea, though it be the blood of a monster rightfully poured out upon the ground. Light was the cost of my purification, for thou art a kind master and an honourable man. But now my hands are clean, I go back to my seat on fair Olympus, where high above the clouds the deathless gods dwell evermore in the clear, bright light of heaven. Yet do I love thee, and will not forget thee. When the shadow of despair falls across thy path, call on me, and I will help thee."

So saying, he bent forward and took Admetus by the hand, and raised him up. Once more that piercing glance burned through to his very soul; then the stranger turned and strode away across the palace court. Like one changed to marble Admetus stood and watched him go. Then with a start he rushed to the gateway, and looked eagerly down the road. But though he shaded and strained his eyes, he could see that familiar form no more. Only far away on the dim horizon the veil of clouds which hung about Olympus melted away beneath the sun's bright rays, and the snow-clad peak flashed clear and sparkling as a crystal against the summer sky.

"Lo, even dread Olympus smiles a welcome to the god of Light and Truth!" said Admetus.

Then with a sigh he turned back into the palace.

VII

For ten long years Admetus and Alcestis ruled in Pheræ, and the gods gave them joy and happiness and two children to bless their wedded love. And when Admetus looked back to the days of the past, he was well pleased with the story of his life. Had he not held an oar in the good ship *Argo*, whose fame had reached to the uttermost parts of the earth? By the strength of his arm he had won to wife the fairest maid in Thessaly, and brought her home behind a pair such as no man before or since had dared to yoke together. Moreover, through the length and breadth of Hellas his house was famous as the home of hospitality and good cheer. Not men alone, but great Apollo, the bright-haired god of Light, had been his guest—nay, his very servant. Was he not king, too, of a rich and fruitful land, in which year by year the earth brought forth plenteous harvests, because the greatness of his name held back the tide of war, and peace with unfettered feet walked joyously through field and city? When he remembered all these things, his heart waxed big with vanity and pride, and he began to forget the gods and to look down upon his fellow-men, and think that he alone of all mankind had done great deeds, and that without him the world would be but a sorry place. This pride it was that made him do a mean thing that marred all the glory of his life.

One day Death came and stood beside him, and

put his seal upon his brow, and Admetus knew that he must die. When he felt that now he stood upon the threshold of Hades, the dim dark world of the dead, where high and low, rich and poor, strong and weak, wander for ever as voiceless shades through the sunless groves, where kingship and slavery are one, his heart was turned to water, and his spirit called aloud in his anguish,

“Apollo, O Apollo! Hear me in my sore distress, and deliver me from death.”

Far away on the sunlit peak of Olympus Apollo heard his cry, and swift as the lightning crosses the sky he came and stood beside him.

“What wouldst thou with me, Admetus?” he asked. “I have come in answer to thy prayer.”

Then Admetus raised his head, and pointed to his brow, and Apollo gazed sadly at him. “I see the seal upon thy brow, my friend—the seal that none may break.”

“Ah, say not that, my lord! Am I not even now in the prime of my manhood, when others look forward to many a long year of joyous life? Why should I die before my time? My mother and my aged father still live, and rejoice in the sunlight, yet no kingdom standeth by the might of their right arm. The meanest slave within my palace is more fortunate than I. Why, out of them all, hath Death laid his hand on me?”

“He is but the servant of the Fates, Admetus, whose ways neither gods nor men can understand.”

"The Fates? - Are they lower than the beasts, then, and will not listen to the voice of reason?"

"The voice of man's reason is to them as the baying of jackals in the wilderness, Admetus."

"O god of Light, is there nothing that will touch their hearts? Canst thou by thy music turn the souls of man and beast, and soothe the fury of the whirlwind and the crying of the rain, and yet over them alone hast thou no power? Ah! by the love thou once didst bear me, go, strike thy lyre before them, and sing thy song of magic. Surely they will not withstand thee, but will put my life into thy hands in return for the beauty of thy song."

"Because I love thee I will go, Admetus. Yet, if I go, it is because they call me; and if I prevail, or if I fail, it is because they have willed it long ago. Farewell."

So Apollo sped away on the wings of the wind, far, far away beyond earth's widest bounds, beyond the region of unmelting snow and the land of the midnight sun, beyond the ever-rolling stream of ocean and the deserts of the air, till he came to the unchanging land where the three Great Sisters dwell together, without beginning and without end. In that land there is neither north nor south, east nor west. There is neither sun nor moon, night nor day, time nor change. On three great thrones of mist the mighty Sisters sit, and their forms are neither foul nor fair. On their brows are crowns of sovereignty, and in their hands the destinies of man, which they sit spinning, for ever spinning,

into the mighty web of Life. The first is Lachesis the Chooser. From the tangled mass beside her she picks out threads of varied hue and hands them to Clotho the Spinner, who weaves them into the web upon her knees. On the other side sits Atropos the Unswerving One. In her hands she holds a pair of shears, and as the ends of the threads hang loose on the wrong side of the web, she cuts them off and casts them at her feet.

So Apollo came and stood before them with his lyre in his hand. Softly he touched the golden strings, then raised his voice and sang. At the sound of that magic song Lachesis forgot to hand the threads to her sister, the web dropped low on Clotho's knee, and the hand of Atropos fell lifeless by her side, and till the ending of the song Time itself stood still. While the magic of his singing held them spellbound Apollo urged his plea.

"Almighty Sisters, from the ends of the world have I come, from the haunts of mortal man, to ask a boon for one I love."

"Say on, Apollo. Thou hast turned our hearts to water by the magic of thy song. What wilt thou?"

"In the fertile land of Phææ, Admetus lies a-dying. He is young, and the love of life runs hot within his veins. He is a great king, too, and rules his subjects well and wisely, and loud will be the wail of the people if he must die before his time. If my song has pleased you, mighty ones, O grant that he may live to a green old age."

"All mortals would live to a green old age, Apollo,

and thou lovest many among the sons of men. There would be no end to our bounty if for every song we must grant thee a life. Nay, ask some other boon, for thy song has reached our hearts !”

But Apollo turned sadly away. “There is nothing else I would ask of you, great Sisters. For this, and for this alone, have I come.”

“On one condition only can we grant thee thy boon, Apollo. Thou sayest that Admetus is a great king, and well loved by all his folk. If among them all he can find one soul that will go to Hades in his place, we will let him live on to a green old age. Surely we ask not much. Some slave who loveth not his life, or some old man whose grey hairs are a burden, will gladly die that one so wise and great may live on for his people’s joy.”

“So be it, mighty ones. Yet methinks ’tis an empty boon thou hast given me, for men cling to life and the sunny days on earth, and Admetus may seek far ere he find one who will cast it aside for the darkness and gloom of the sad underworld. And, in any case, he is not one to live on at the price of another’s life.”

“We can grant no more,” they said.

So Apollo went back by the way he had gone ; and he came and stood beside Admetus, and told him the word of the Fates. When Admetus heard it he was glad.

“O God of Light, thou wast ever my friend, and now I shall owe my very life to thee. How can I thank thee ?”

But Apollo looked through to his inmost soul. "Dost thou accept the condition, then?" he asked.

"What else can I do, master?" he replied.

"Thou canst die."

"I know it," cried Admetus; "but why must I die before my time? With the Argonauts I sailed the unknown seas; in the lists I have fought and prevailed against the flower of Hellas, and for twelve months a god deigned to dwell beneath my palace roof. Surely my life is worth more than most men's, and I do well to keep it while I may."

"So be it," said Apollo, but his face was stern and terrible, and Admetus trembled at his frown. "Go now, and find one who will die for thee." And he turned and left him.

VIII

When Admetus was left alone his heart was in a tumult. He felt the wrath of Apollo like the lash of a whip, and he knew that his anger was just. When he looked back on his life, he was ashamed at the change which long years of prosperity and peace had wrought in him; that much manliness at least was left him. When he thought of the great deeds he had done in his youth, and how, when he had but sipped of its joys, he had been ready a hundred times to cast life lightly aside, he felt like a thief slinking guiltily home by night, laden with the spoils that will make himself rich and leave his friend poor and starving. If he took another's life

as the price of his own, he felt he would never be able again to look a man straight in the face. And yet he could live his life but once, and life, with prosperity and ease, sunshine and riches, had become more dear to him than honour, more dear than the love and esteem of his fellow-men. His very deeds of valour had become a snare to entice him to the path of meanness and dishonour, to make him hold another's life as a cheap price to pay for one so great as he. So he quenched the last spark of manliness that still struggled for life in his heart, and sent a proclamation through the land, bidding all those who would die that their king might live, to come and stand before him in the palace, that he might choose between them; for he thought that many would be glad to die for him. For many a long day he waited, and no man came. Then he sent forth trusty messengers to stir the people's hearts; but they returned with words instead of men.

"We will ride in the chase, we will sail the stormy seas, we will fight against our country's foes, and in all these things will we risk our lives to save the king. But we will not leave our wives and little ones and the pleasant life on earth, for no cause save that another may live beyond his fated time."

Such were the words of the people.

Then Admetus sent for all his household—the slaves that had been born and bred within the palace. And they said that they would toil for him all their days, but die for him they would not; for

even the life of a slave was better than the endless years of gloom in the kingdom of the dead.

Then the heart of Admetus grew bitter within him, and he hated the thought of death more than ever before, when he found that even the meanest life was dear to the hearts of men. In his despair he turned to his aged parents, for he thought within himself,

"Surely one of them will be ready to die for their own son. At best they have not many years of life, and if I die before them they will have no son to bury them and perform the funeral rites and prayers, as only a son can do for his parents."

So he went to Pheres his father, and begged that he would die in his place. But his father answered,

"Dost thou think that because thou lovest the sunlight thy father loves it not?"

"Nay, but in any case Death must lay his hand upon thee soon, whilst I am in the prime of life."

"Because the years that are left me are few, they are none the less sweet. Nevermore in the land of Hades shall I warm my old bones in the sun as I look forth upon the fruitful earth. So the years that are left are doubly dear."

"Then, when thou comest to die, men will point the finger of scorn at thy grave. 'Behold the coward, who, though his hair was grey and his limbs were feeble, yet refused to die for his own son!' Thy name will be a byword throughout all Hellas."

"When I am dead it matters little what men shall say of me," said Pheres.

"May the gods forgive thee for what thou hast said!" cried Admetus, and turned away in wrath. For it was a dreadful thing for a Greek to say he cared not what men would think of him when he was dead.

Then Admetus went to his mother. But she, no less than his father, clung to life, and refused to die in his stead.

Last of all he turned to his wife, Alcestis. From the beginning she had been ready to die for him, for she loved him, and placed his life above her own. But he had said there was no need that she should die and take away half the joy of his life, when another would do as well.

"It needs a great love to sacrifice life for the sake of another," she had answered, "and there is no one in all the world who loves thee as I do"

Now he found that her words were true, and that he must either die himself or take her life as the price of his own; and his self-love had the mastery, though he tried to persuade his heart that he was living beyond his appointed time for his country's sake and his people's good. Yet at bottom he was not satisfied, and his heart grew bitter against all those who had refused to die for him, and he accused them of being the murderers of his wife. But he knew full well that it was his own hand that was sending her to her grave in the flower of her life.

At last the day of doom arrived on which Alcestis was to die. Till then she had put aside all thought of death, and had lived her life as though no shadow hung over her; for she thought within herself,

“At least I will be happy my last days on earth. I shall have long enough to mourn for my life in the kingdom of the dead.”

But now the last day had come she could put away the thought of death no longer. Before a gleam of light shone forth on the far horizon she was up to greet the first rays of the sun, for she was a true daughter of Hellas, and she loved the glad sunshine and all that was bright and fair, while death and darkness and the gloom of the sad underworld filled her soul with horror. For the last time she looked upon the faint gleam in the east and watched it spread over the sky, and saw the red disc of the sun as he rose from the way of the sea and made the pale dawn blush. The clouds were tinged with glory, and the heavens were filled with light, and the earth awoke with a smile of flowers dancing in the glad morning breeze. Then she washed in the fresh fountain water, put on her gayest robes, and went and stood before the altar on the hearth, to pray her last prayer on earth.

“O lady Goddess! I am going far away across the dark river of Death, and for the last time do I make my prayer to thee. Ah, when I am gone, have mercy on my children. Hard are the

ways of the world, and they are young to be left without a mother's love. Put forth the right hand of thy pity, lady, and bring them to a glad old age. Let them not perish, as I must, in the bloom of their life, but give to my son a loving wife, and a noble husband to my daughter; and may they be happy all their days!"

Then she went through the palace and bade farewell to all the servants. To each one she gave her hand, even to the meanest slave of them all, and spoke kindly to them. And they bathed her hand with their tears, for they loved their mistress, and knew that when she died they would lose a good friend. As she went the children clung weeping about her skirts, for they, too, knew that she must die.

Last of all she went alone to her chamber, for she could endure no more; and she threw herself upon her couch, and wept as though her heart would break. She kissed the pillows and smoothed them tenderly with her hands.

"Alas, alas! for the happy days on earth," she cried, "and happiest of all the years that I have lived here as the wife of Admetus! Farewell, my couch—farewell for ever!"

She tried to tear herself away, but again and again when she had reached the door she turned back and fell once more weeping upon her couch. At last she felt the weakness of death creeping over her, and she knew if she did not leave her chamber then, she would leave it nevermore alive.

All her tears were spent, and she had no strength left to weep any more. Outside in the great hall Admetus sat with his head upon his hands, weeping for his wife, and cursing the bitterness of his fate. And she went and stood beside him.

"Take me out into the sunlight, Admetus," she said; "the darkness within oppresses me. I can breathe more freely in the air."

When he looked at her he was afraid, for she was as pale as death. Gently he raised her in his arms, and placed her on a couch in the portico before the palace. And when she saw the blue sky and the sunshine she smiled.

"O sun and light of day," she said, "and ye dancing, eddying clouds, farewell!"

"O ye gods, have mercy!" cried Admetus. "My dearest, look up, and leave me not all desolate."

But with a cry of fear she started up, and pointed in front.

"Look, look! The boat of the dead, and the ferryman of souls with his hand upon the pole—Charon! He calls, 'Alcestis, why dost thou tarry? Hasten and come with me.'"

"Ah, Fate, Fate—cruel Fate!" cried Admetus.

"He is snatching me away—oh, save me!—down, down to the dark halls of death. Away, let me go! He frowns with his dark gleaming brows. Ah, the dread journey before me!"

"Leave me not, leave me not!" cried Admetus.

"Lay me down again," said Alcestis, and her voice was scarce more than a whisper. "The

strength is gone out of my limbs, and darkness creeps over my eyes. My children, where are you? Come here, my little ones, and nestle close beside me."

And the children crept silently to her.

Then she held out her hand to Admetus.

"My lord," she said, "farewell. Already my feet are planted in the paths of death, and thou canst not hold me back. I have been a loving wife to thee, Admetus; my beauty, my youth, my joy of life—all these I give to thee. Ah, when I am dead, forget me not, for the children's sake, for these poor little ones—promise me. Promise me thou wilt not wed again, for a step-mother's heart would be hard against my children, and they would suffer. Promise me that thou wilt be a father and mother to them in one."

"I promise," said Admetus.

"Then into thy hands I give them. Poor little ones, what will you do without me? My son, for thee thy father will ever be a strong tower of defence, and will bring thee up to be a true man. But for thee, little maiden, my heart bleeds. Thou wilt have no mother to dress thee on thy wedding-day, or to comfort thee in thy sorrows, when there is no love like a mother's. Be doubly tender with her, Admetus."

"I will, I will. All that thou sayest I will do, and more also. Not for one year only, but all my life long, will I mourn for thee. Forget me not, I pray thee. Prepare a place for me below, that I may be with thee when I come to die."

"Nay, I will not forget thee. Lay me back now. I can say no more."

Gently he laid her back, and knelt down by her side, and all they that stood around bowed their heads in silence, for they knew that Death was standing in their midst.

At last Admetus looked up.

"My friends," he said, "she is gone. Help me now to carry her in, that the maidens may clothe her in the robes of death."

Gently and reverently, with heads bowed in grief, they carried her in. The maidens clad her in long white robes, and laid her on the bier, and the mourners stood round and sang a dirge for the dead. On the threshold before the palace Admetus placed the locks he had shorn from his head in token that within one lay dead, and he put on long black robes of mourning, and took off the golden circlet from his brow. Throughout the city he sent a proclamation to say the queen was dead.

"Men of Thessaly," it said, "all ye who own my sway, come, share with me in sorrow for my wife who is dead. Shave the bright locks from your heads, and don your sable robes. Harness your four-horsed chariots; put the bit in the mouths of your steeds. Cut off the long manes from their necks, and follow with me to her grave. Let not the voice of the flute be heard in your streets, nor the sound of the lyre, till full twelve moons have waxed and waned, for she was the noblest of women, and dearest of all on earth to me. Her

life she sacrificed for mine. Pay her high honours, then, for she is most worthy."

IX

Whilst the preparations for the funeral were being made, anyone who chanced to look along the highroad would have seen a stranger making his way towards the palace. He was a strong man and tall—three cubits and more in height. The muscles of his arms and chest stood out like thongs of cord. In his hand he carried a huge knotted club, and over his shoulders hung a lion's skin. If the wind or the sun were too strong, he would draw the jaws of the beast over his head like a hood, and the great teeth shone out white and terrible over his brows and under his chin. He walked along with great swinging strides, balancing the club upon his shoulder as though it were some light twig, and not heavy as a sapling oak. As he went through the villages the people stood aside from his path in wonder, and even the strongest champion of them all would whisper, "May the gods deliver me from ever having to stand up against him in single combat. In his little finger is the strength of my right arm."

But he walked on, little heeding what folk thought of him, singing now and again snatches of some drinking-song, and passing the time of day, or cracking some joke with those he met upon the way: for, in truth, he had a merry heart, and wished

well to all mankind. Those who were frightened when first they saw his club and lion's skin forgot their fears as soon as they could see his face, for his eyes were blue and laughing as the summer sky, and his smile was bright as the sun in spring. And yet there were lines and scars about his features which proved that he was no idler, but one who had looked labour and danger in the face.

So he came to Pheræ and went up the steep path to the palace. It chanced that Admetus was standing in the portico on his way in. When the stranger saw him he shouted out,

"Hail to thee, Admetus! Turn back and greet an old friend."

When Admetus heard him, he turned and came towards him.

"Welcome, Heracles," he said, and held out his hand to greet him.

But when Heracles saw his black robes and shorn locks he was troubled.

"I have come at an evil hour, Admetus," he said; "thou art mourning for one who is dear to thee."

"Ay," he answered; "it is true"

"One of thy children, can it be, or thy father?"

"Nay, there is nought amiss with them. It is a woman I am carrying out to burial this day."

"Is she a stranger, or one of the family?"

"She is not one of the family. Yet she is very dear to us, for on her father's death she came and lived with us. She was a fair and noble woman, and all the house is plunged in grief at her death."

Σ

Meanwhile Heracles had been led to a guest-chamber apart, and the servants ministered to all his wants, and brought him water to wash with, and change of raiment. As they waited on him, he talked gaily to them of his adventures on the way, and made them laugh in spite of their grief for their mistress. Only the old serving-man stood aloof, and looked darkly at the stranger who dared to make merry in a house of mourning.

When he had washed and dressed, he sat down to meat. They placed an ample meal before him, and brought him wine to drink. But in his eyes their bounty was dearth, and he kept calling for more till they could scarce contain their astonishment at his appetite. At length, when he had eaten his fill, he crowned his head with vine-leaves, and fell to drinking long and deep. The wine warmed his heart, and sent a cheerful glow through all his veins. So happy was he that he could not sit in silence, but raised his voice and sang, and his singing was like the roaring of a bull.

"Great Zeus, preserve us!" sighed the old waiting-man; "never have I heard anything more discordant and unseemly."

But the guest grew merrier and merrier, and the face of the serving-man, as he watched, grew longer and longer. At length Heracles himself noticed his disapproving countenance.

"Ho, there!" cried he; "why so dark and

gloomy, my friend? I had as soon be welcomed by an iceberg as by thee, old sour-face."

The serving-man answered him never a word, but only scowled the more.

"What!" cried Heracles, "is this the sort of welcome thou art wont to give thy master's guests? Come hither, and I will teach thee better ways."

And he took hold of the old man and set him down beside him at the table.

"Alack! What a countenance! And all for a strange girl who has chanced to die. How wilt thou look when one of thy masters is laid in the grave? I like not this mask of hypocrisy, my friend. Thou carest not for her who is dead, but pullest a long face, and strikest a chill to the hearts of all beholders, because, forsooth, it is seemly to mourn for the dead. Why, we must all pay our tribute to death, every man of us, and no one knoweth whether he shall ever see the next day's light; then count the present as thine own, and eat and drink with me and make merry. A frowning face profits not the dead—nay, it serves but to blacken the sunshine of this life that we can live but once. Up, man, drink and wash away thy frowns! Believe me, life is no life at all—only labour and misfortune to those who walk through it with pompous steps and sour faces."

And he poured out a brimming goblet.

"All this I know full well, master," answered the old man, "but the shadow that has fallen on

this house is too heavy for me to join in thy revelry."

"Thou makest too much of death. Thou canst not grieve for a stranger as thou wouldst for one of the household. Thy master and mistress live. Let that suffice thee."

"What! My master and mistress live? Alas! my master is too kind a host."

"Must I starve, then, because a strange girl is dead?"

"It is no stranger, I tell thee, but one most near and dear."

"Have I been deceived? Has he hidden some misfortune from me?"

"Ask no more, but go in peace. My master's sorrows are for me to bear, not for thee. And he bade me not speak of it."

"Speak, speak, man! I see he has hidden some great sorrow from me. Who is the woman who is dead?"

"Ask me not. My master told me not to say."

"And I forbid thee not to say. Tell me forthwith!"

So fierce and terrible did he look that the old man trembled before him.

"May my lord forgive me!" said he. "It is Alcestis his wife."

"Alcestis!" cried Heracles. "And he would not share his sorrow with me, his friend, but let me come in and feast and sing while he went out to bury her. Woe is me! I thought he loved me."

"It was to spare thee pain that he did not tell thee, master."

"How came she to die?" asked Heracles, and took off the vine-leaves from his head, and poured out the wine upon the floor.

Then the old man told him the whole tale.

"Where have they buried her?" he asked, when it was ended.

"Out yonder, where the white highway leads to Larissa, in the plain. There, on the outskirts of the city, thou wilt find the tomb of the kings of Phæræ, where they are laying her."

"Is there no shorter way I can go and reach her quickly?"

"There is a footpath by the fields that I will show thee."

"Come, then, straightway. I must go and lie in wait for the black Lord of Death. He will come up to drink of the blood that is poured out for him beside the tomb. Then I will fall upon him from my ambush and wrestle with him and prevail, and he shall give me back Alcestis. Even if I must go down to Hades and fetch her, she shall come back. She is too fair and too noble to pass her young life in the dark underworld."

The old man marvelled at his words; but he went out with him, and showed him the footpath across the fields, and stood watching him till he passed out of sight.

"Verily, we talk and weep," he muttered to

himself, "and he laughs and acts. He is worth ten of us."

XI

Meanwhile the funeral procession was coming back along the highway. As they came into the city each man departed to his own house; only Admetus with his near friends and kinsmen returned to the palace to celebrate the funeral feast. Whilst they were waiting for the feast to be prepared, Admetus stayed outside alone in the court. He sat down on one of the stone seats beneath the colonnade, and buried his face in his hands. He could not bring himself to go into the house, where everything would remind him of the wife he had lost—the chair in which she used to sit, empty now; the fire on the altar burning low, and the ashes scattered about, because she was there no more to feed the dying flames. The full force of the sacrifice came home to him now, and he shuddered as he thought of the deed he had done.

"I have slain her—I have slain her whom I loved, to save myself from death, because I loved my life, and hated to go to the dark world below. Woe is me!" he cried. "The sun is turned to darkness and the earth to Hades since she went away. I grasped at the substance, and all the while I followed after a shade. Fool that I was to upbraid them who refused to die for me and cast her death in their teeth! She is dead, dead—slain

by my hand alone. Nevermore can I look my people in the face, nor glory in the deeds I have done. The shame of my cowardice will blot them all out, and I shall slink like a cur among my fellows. Would that I had died with her!"

Thus he sat making fruitless moan. His friends came out and tried to comfort him and bring him into the house, but he sent them away, and would not go in. All the evening he sat there alone till darkness began to fall. At length he felt a heavy hand laid upon his shoulder, and, looking up, he saw Heracles standing beside him.

"Why couldst thou not trust me, Admetus?" he asked. "All thy household, all the city, knew that thy wife Alcestis was dead. Me only, thy familiar friend, didst thou keep in ignorance. I had thought to stand beside thee in thy sorrow, and thou didst not even tell me of it."

"I was ashamed," answered Admetus.

"Well, well, what is done cannot be undone. There is but one way now that thou canst prove thou art still my friend. After I had eaten, I walked out across the fields, and came upon a place where the people were holding games and giving rich prizes to the winners—horses and oxen, and a fair woman to the best man of all. When I saw the woman I determined to win her. So I entered for the contest and beat all my rivals. The woman I have brought back with me now, and beg of thee to keep her till I come back from

the wild Thracian folk, for I cannot take her with me there. If by any chance I should never come back, but meet my fate away, I give her to thee to keep for thyself. I have brought her with me now to give into thy care."

As he spoke, he led forward by the hand a woman who had been standing near him. She was closely veiled, so that Admetus, when he glanced up at her, could not see her face, but only the outline of her form.

"Oh, take her away, take her away!" he cried. "In height and figure she is like my wife, and I cannot bear to look upon her. I would do much for thee, my friend, but ask not this of me. No woman shall ever live in my house again. Take her to some other of thy friends."

In spite of all Heracles could say, he refused to take her.

"I see that thou wouldst no more be my friend, Admetus," he said at last. "First thou wilt not tell me of thy sorrow, and now thou wilt not do this little thing for me. I will go and trouble thee no more with my friendship."

At this Admetus was cut to the quick.

"Ah, say not that. Thou knowest that I love thee, but this is a hard thing thou askest. Whenever I look at her I shall be reminded of my wife. And the tongue of slander will not be silent. Men will say that I take comfort, and have forgotten the woman who gave her life for mine. Nevertheless, if thou wilt have it so, I

yield. Take the woman in, or let one of the servants show her the way."

"Nay," said Heracles; "to thee alone will I trust her. She is fair and noble, and I would not have her treated as a common woman"

And he forced Admetus to take her by the hand.

"Now I know that thou wilt treat her honourably, thou mayest look upon her face," he said, and lifted up the veil which shrouded her.

When Admetus saw her face, he fell back terrified, for, pale and beautiful, scarce looking as though she breathed, Alcestis stood before him.

"Ye gods!" he gasped; "the spirit of my wife!"

"Nay," said Heracles, "but her very self."

"Thou mockest; it cannot be."

"It is no mockery, as who should know better than I who won her?" said Heracles. "By Zeus, I have wrestled many a tough match, but never a one so tough as this, the gods be praised! I have met Death face to face, and I hope I may never have to stand up against him more."

"Ah, my friend, how can I thank thee? I have not deserved so much joy," cried Admetus, and fell on his knees before them.

"I thought not of thy deserts, but of hers," said Heracles. "Come, take her in."

"I dare not touch her. Ah, lady, canst thou love one who sent thee to thy death?" he asked, with head bowed down before her.

She answered him never a word, but held out both her hands and raised him from his knees; and he looked deep into her eyes, and found them full of love. Tenderly and humbly he put his arm about her and led her away, and felt that, if anything on earth could ever raise him from the depths of selfishness and meanness to which he had fallen, it would be the boundless, measureless love of the woman before him.

"Now to change the funeral feast to a banquet of rejoicing," cried Heracles. "Truly, I could eat an ox after this last bout of mine."

THE CURSE OF ECHO

IN the flowery groves of Helicon, Echo was once a fair nymph who, hand in hand with her sisters, sported along the green lawns and by the side of the mountain-streams. Among them all her feet were the lightest and her laugh the merriest, and in the telling of tales not one of them could touch her. So if ever any among them were plotting mischief in their hearts, they would say to her,

“Echo, thou weaver of words, go thou and sit beside Hera in her bower, and beguile her with a tale that she come not forth and find us. See thou make it a long one, Echo, and we will give thee a garland to twine in thy hair.”

And Echo would laugh a gay laugh, which rang through the grove.

“What will you do when she tires of my tales?” she asked.

“When that time comes we shall see,” said they.

So with another laugh she would trip away and cast herself on the grass at Hera’s feet. When Hera looked upon Echo her stern brow would relax, and she would smile upon her and stroke her hair.

"What hast thou come for now, thou sprite?" she would ask.

"I had a great longing to talk with thee, great Hera," she would answer, "and I have a tale—a wondrous new tale—to tell thee."

"Thy tales are as many as the risings of the sun, Echo, and each one of them as long as an old man's beard."

"The day is yet young, mother," she would say, "and the tales I have told thee before are as mud which is trampled underfoot by the side of the one I shall tell thee now."

"Go to, then," said Hera, "and if it pleases me I will listen to the end."

So Echo would sit upon the grass at Hera's feet, and with her eyes fixed upon her face she would tell her tale. She had the gift of words, and, moreover, she had seen and heard many strange things which she alone could tell of. These she would weave into romances, adding to them as best pleased her, or taking from them at will; for the best of tale-tellers are those who can lie, but who mingle in with their lies some grains of truth which they have picked from their own experience. And Hera would forget her watchfulness and her jealousies, and listen entranced, while the magic of Echo's words made each scene live before her eyes. Meanwhile the nymphs would sport to their hearts' content and never fear her anger.

But at last came the black day of reckoning when Hera found out the prank which Echo had

played upon her so long, and the fire of her wrath flashed forth like lightning.

"The gift whereby thou hast deceived me shall be thine no more," she cried. "Henceforward thou shalt be dumb till someone else has spoken, and then, even if thou wilt, thou shalt not hold thy tongue, but must needs repeat once more the last words that have been spoken."

"Alas! alas!" cried the nymphs in chorus.

"Alas! alas!" cried Echo after them, and could say no more, though she longed to speak and beg Hera to forgive her. So did it come to pass that she lost her voice, and could only say that which others put in her mouth, whether she wished it or no.

Now, it chanced one day that the young Narcissus strayed away from his companions in the hunt, and when he tried to find them he only wandered further, and lost his way upon the lonely heights of Helicon. He was now in the bloom of his youth, nearing manhood, and fair as a flower in spring, and all who saw him straightway loved him and longed for him. But, though his face was smooth and soft as maiden's, his heart was hard as steel; and while many loved him and sighed for him, they could kindle no answering flame in his breast, but he would spurn them, and treat them with scorn, and go on his way, nothing caring. When he was born, the blind seer Teiresias had prophesied concerning him.

"So long as he sees not himself he shall live and be happy."

And his words came true, for Narcissus cared for neither man nor woman, but only for his own pleasure ; and because he was so fair that all who saw him loved him for his beauty, he found it easy to get from them what he would. But he himself knew nought of love, and therefore but little of grief ; for love at the best brings joy and sorrow hand in hand, and if unreturned, it brings nought but pain.

Now, when the nymphs saw Narcissus wandering alone through the woods, they, too, loved him for his beauty, and they followed him wherever he went. But because he was a mortal they were shy of him, and would not show themselves, but hid behind the trees and rocks so that he should not see them ; and amongst the others Echo followed him, too. At last, when he found he had really wandered astray, he began to shout for one of his companions.

“Ho, there ! where art thou ?” he cried.

“Where art thou ?” answered Echo.

When he heard the voice, he stopped and listened, but he could hear nothing more. Then he called again.

“I am here in the wood—Narcissus.”

“In the wood—Narcissus,” said she.

“Come hither,” he cried.

“Come hither,” she answered.

Wondering at the strange voice which answered him he looked all about, but could see no one.

“Art thou close at hand ?” he asked.

"Close at hand," answered Echo.

Wondering the more at seeing no one, he went forward in the direction of the voice. Echo, when she found he was coming towards her, fled further, so that when next he called, her voice sounded far away. But wherever she was, he still followed after her, and she saw that he would not let her escape; for wherever she hid, if he called, she had to answer, and so show him her hiding-place. By now they had come to an open space in the trees, where the green lawn sloped down to a clear pool in the hollow. Here by the margin of the water she stood, with her back to the tall, nodding bulrushes, and as Narcissus came out from the trees she wrung her hands, and the salt tears dropped from her eyes; for she loved him, and longed to speak to him, and yet she could not say a word. When he saw her he stopped.

"Art thou she who calls me?" he asked.

"Who calls me?" she answered.

"I have told thee, Narcissus," he said.

"Narcissus," she cried, and held out her arms to him.

"Who art thou?" he asked.

"Who art thou?" said she.

"Have I not told thee," he said impatiently, "Narcissus?"

"Narcissus," she said again, and still held out her hands beseechingly.

"Tell me," he cried "who art thou and why dost thou call me?"

"Why dost thou call me?" said she.

At this he grew angry.

"Maiden, whoever thou art, thou hast led me a pretty dance through the woods, and now thou dost nought but mock me."

"Thou dost nought but mock me," said she.

At this he grew yet more angry, and began to abuse her, but every word of abuse that he spoke she hurled back at him again. At last, tired out with his wanderings and with anger, he threw himself on the grass by the pool, and would not look at her nor speak to her again. For a time she stood beside him weeping, and longing to speak to him and explain, but never a word could she utter. So at last in her misery she left him, and went and hid herself behind a rock close by. After a while, when his anger had cooled down somewhat, Narcissus remembered he was very thirsty, and noticing for the first time the clear pool beside him, he bent over the edge of the bank to drink. As he held out his hand to take the water, he saw looking up towards him a face which was the fairest face he had ever looked on, and his heart, which never yet had known what love was, at last was set on fire by the face in the pool. With a sigh he held out both his arms towards it, and the figure also held out two arms to him, and Echo from the rock answered back his sigh. When he saw the figure stretching out towards him and heard the sigh, he thought that his love was returned, and he bent down closer to the water and whispered, "I love thee."

"I love thee," answered Echo from the rock.

At these words he bent down further, and tried to clasp the figure in his arms, but as he did so, it vanished away. The surface of the pool was covered with ripples, and he found he was clasping empty water to his breast. So he drew back and waited awhile, thinking he had been over-hasty. In time, the ripples died away and the face appeared again as clear as before, looking up at him longingly from the water. Once again he bent towards it, and tried to clasp it, and once again it fled from his embrace. Time after time he tried, and always the same thing happened, and at last he gave up in despair, and sat looking down into the water, with the teardrops falling from his eyes, and the figure in the pool wept, too, and looked up at him with a look of longing and despair. The longer he looked, the more fiercely did the flame of love burn in his breast, till at length he could bear it no more, but determined to reach the desire of his heart or die. So for the last time he leaned forward, and when he found that once again he was clasping the empty water, he threw himself from the bank into the pool, thinking that in the depths, at any rate, he would find his love. But he found naught but death among the weeds and stones of the pool, and knew not that it was his own face he loved reflected in the water below him. Thus were the words of the prophet fulfilled, "So long as he sees not himself he shall live and be happy."

Echo, peeping out from the rock, saw all that

had happened, and when Narcissus cast himself into the pool, she rushed forward, all too late, to stop him. When she found she could not save him, she cast herself on the grass by the pool, and wept and wept, till her flesh and her bones wasted away with weeping, and naught but her voice remained and the curse that was on her. So to this day she lives, a formless voice haunting rocks and caves and vaulted halls. Herself no man has seen since the day Narcissus saw her ringing her hands for love of him beside the nodding bulrushes, and no man ever shall see again. But her voice we all have heard repeating our words when we thought that no one was by; and though now she will say whatever we bid her, if once the curse were removed, the cry of her soul would be,

“Narcissus, Narcissus, my love, come back—come back to me!”

By the side of the clear brown pool, on the grass that Echo had watered with her tears, there sprang up a sweet-scented flower, with a pure white face and a crown of gold. And to this day in many a land men call that flower “Narcissus,” after the lad who, for love of his own fair face, was drowned in the waters of Helicon.

THE DIVINE MUSICIAN

NORTH-WEST of the Ægean, where the cliffs of Pelion rise sheer out of the sea, dwelt long ago Cheiron, the centaur, the wisest of living things, half man, half horse. Many brothers had he, who in form were like himself, but their hearts within were hard and wild, and because of their untamed passions and their cruelty and lust, they were hated alike by gods and men. But Cheiron was gentle and mild. He knew all manner of strange things, he could prophesy, and play upon the lyre, and cure men of their hurts by means of healing herbs. He was brave withal, and had been in many a bloody fight, and knew the arts of war full as well as the arts of peace. Wherefore the old Hellenes called him Cheiron, the Craftsman, and sent up their sons to live with him that they might be taught all the things which man should know. In a hollow cave on the mountain-side he had his home. Far up above him the snow-capped peaks of Pelion kept watch over the nestling townships of the plain, and far, far below the waves of the Ægean washed without ceasing on the rocks of that pitiless coast, now soft and soothing as the song a mother sings to her child, now loud and boisterous beneath the lash

of the storm-wind, when the seabirds fly screaming to the shelter of the shore. All around were dark forests of chestnut, pine and oak, where many a fierce beast had his lair. In the branches of the trees the wild birds built their nests and filled the dark glades with song. About the mouth of the cave the ground was trampled hard beneath the tread of many feet, and paths led this way and that, some into the heart of the forest, others down the steep cliff to the shore.

Every morning at sunrise a troop of boys and youths would come forth from the cave, and, dividing into groups, would go their several ways to fish or to hunt, or to follow the course of some stream to its unknown source in the mountains. Sometimes Cheiron himself would go with them, if he thought they had need of his help, but more often he left them to their own devices, to follow each one his own bent as nature prompted him. In the evening they would come home and tell him of their doings in the day; and he would praise or blame them, according as they had done well or ill, and show them how they might do better another time. Then they would go to their couches of dried moss and leaves, and sleep the deep sleep of youth and health, while the cool night breeze blew in upon their faces from the mouth of the cave, and put fresh life and strength into their tired limbs. In the winter-time, when the night was longer than the day, and the snow lay deep upon the hills, they would light a great fire in front of the cave with

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logs they had stored in the summer months, and Cheiron would take his lyre and sing to them of all things in heaven and earth, while they lay round about and listened. The songs which he sang to them then they never forgot, because Cheiron was wise, and spoke to their souls in his singing. So they laid up his songs in their hearts, and many a long year after, when they were grown men far away, and some danger or difficulty stood in their path, the drift of his teaching would come back to them in the words of a song, and their hearts would grow brave and strong once more to act worthily of their boyhood's sunny days on Pelion. Many a hero whose name still lives among men had been trained by Cheiron in his youth—Peleus, who married a goddess, and Achilles his son, the swiftest and bravest of mortal men; and Jason, the leader of the Argonauts; and Asklepios, the mighty healer; and, not least among them, Orpheus, the greatest of Greek musicians and mystics, whose tale I will tell you now.

One day, as the shades of evening were beginning to fall, Cheiron stood before the mouth of the cave waiting for the lads to come home. Sooner than he expected he saw one of them far away coming down a path from the mountains, and he marvelled that he should return so soon and alone. As he came nearer Cheiron saw that he walked with his eyes upon the ground, deep in thought. Every now and again he stopped and looked round upon the peaceful hillsides stretching calm and smiling

in the golden glow of the evening; and when he had gazed for a moment he sighed, as though he would breathe into his soul the beauty he saw around him, and then went on his way once more with his eyes on the ground. So he walked till he came close to the cave and saw Cheiron standing in the entrance. Then he ran up to him and put his hand upon his shoulder.

"My father," he cried, "look round upon the hills, hast thou ever seen them so fair as they have been this day?"

Cheiron smiled at his words.

"Orpheus," he said, "the fair face of the earth changes but little. In the soul of man it lies to look upon her and see her beauty or to be blind."

"Till this day I have been blind, Cheiron," he said.

"And who has lifted the veil from thine eyes, my son?" asked his master.

"I know not," he said. "But this morning, while yet it was dark, there came to me a strange unrest and a longing to be alone. So I crept forth from the cave whilst you were all sleeping, and climbed up the mountain-side—up, up, in the grey light before dawn, till I came to the place where the white snow lies like a cloak about the shaggy shoulders of Pelion. There I left the track of my footsteps where no feet but mine had trod, and climbed up upon a boulder and looked out across the sea. And I saw the great sun rise out of the east. As I looked it seemed that I beheld the

face of God ; and as the snow and the sea and the forests awoke to life in the light of His glory, my soul awoke within me. All the day long I wandered about the forests and hills ; and I saw the beauty of the trees and the grass, and the grace of the wild deer as he bounded over the rocks, as I had never seen it before. The wonder of this day lies like a burden on my heart that I fain would ease, yet I have no words to tell of it."

Then Cheiron took up the lyre which was lying by his side and passed his fingers gently over the strings.

"Orpheus," he said, "many a long year ago, when thou wast a little lad, thy mother Calliope brought thee to me. And she put thy hand in my hand, and said : 'Cheiron, make a man of my son. Make him brave and fearless and strong, a worthy companion of the noble lads thou hast around thee. When the right time comes I will breathe my spirit upon him, and he shall be great, as few in this world are great.' This day she has kept her word, Orpheus. She has breathed her spirit upon thee, and has opened the eyes of thy soul and made them see."

"Who is my mother Calliope ?" asked the lad.

"She is the Fair-voiced One who speaks through the lips of mortals by music and song, Orpheus. With her sisters, she dwells for ever by the sunlit streams of Helicon, where they follow in the footsteps of Apollo, their lord, across the green lawns and the flowery meadows. All knowledge, all

music of sound and of words, comes to men by their gift—those nine great sisters, the Muses. Happy art thou to be her son. Take now this lyre from mine hand. Ease the burden of thy soul in song, and learn how great is the gift she has given thee.”

So Orpheus took the lyre from his master, and struck the chords, as all the lads who dwelt with Cheiron knew full well how to do. But instead of the old songs that he had learnt from his childhood, a new song came to his lips, and he sang as he had never sung before. Far away upon the hillsides his companions heard his voice, and they stopped upon their homeward way to listen, as the evening breeze bore the sound to their ears. When they knew that the voice came from home, they hastened on and drew silently near, that no sound might disturb the singer, and throwing themselves upon the ground at his feet, forgot their weariness and hunger as they listened. On and on he sang, forgetful of all else but his song, till the red glow of the evening died away in the west and the stars shone pale in the twilight. There was a strange magic about his music which drew all living things to his feet, as a magnet draws the cold heart of steel. From the woods and the forests they came, and from the bare hillsides—the lion, the leopard, and the trembling fawn. The snake came forth from his hiding-place, the rabbit from his hole, and the wild birds wheeled about his head and settled

on the brow of the cave. The very trees seemed to hear him, as they swayed their heads to and fro to the rhythm of his song. As he looked round upon his comrades whilst he sang, his heart grew strong within him, for he felt that a strange new power had been born in his soul, which could bow the heads of men beneath his will as the wind bows the rushes by the stream. So he sang on as the twilight deepened into night, and all the stars of heaven came forth to listen, till at length his song died upon his lips, like a breeze lulled to rest at sunset. For a moment the creatures lay spellbound around him; then one by one they crept back to their homes, with their fears and their hatreds tamed for a while by the magic of his singing. And his companions crowded round him with words of praise and eager questions.

"Who taught thee thy magic song, Orpheus?" they cried.

"The sunrise and the snow," he answered, "and the teaching of Cheiron, and my happy days with you, and the spirit of my mother Calliope—all these have taught me my song."

But his answer was a dark saying to them, and not one of them understood it, save Cheiron. He knew that it is the commonest things in life that are the material of all that is beautiful and fair, just as a temple may be built of common stone; but that the children of the Muses are few, who can by music and art open the blind hearts of men to see.

Thus did the gift of song fall upon Orpheus, so that he became the greatest of all singers upon earth. All day long he would wander about the woods and the hills, and tame the heart of every living thing with the magic of his voice.

One day it chanced that he came into a wood where he had never been before, and he followed a grass-grown track which led to the mouth of a cave. On one side of the cave stood a tall beech-tree, whose moss-covered roots offered a tempting seat, and close by a clear stream gushed forth from the rocks. He drank eagerly of the water, for he had wandered far and was thirsty; and when he had quenched his thirst, he sat down on the roots of the beech-tree and began his song. As before, the wild things gathered about him, and crouched at his feet, tame and silent, as he sang; and from the shadow of the cave crept a wood-nymph, and lay upon the grass, with her chin between her hands, looking up into his face. For a time he did not see her, so silently had she come; but at last the power of her eyes drew his eyes upon her, and he turned his head and looked at her. When he saw her, his arm fell useless by his side and his voice died away in his throat, for he had never looked upon anyone so fair. Her hair was black as the storm-cloud, but her eyes were blue as the summer sky, and she lay like a white flower in the grass at his feet. For a long moment he gazed into her face without speaking, as she gazed back at him, and at last he spoke.

"Who art thou, maiden?" he asked.

"I am Eurydice," she answered.

"Thy hair is black as midnight, Eurydice," he said, "and thine eyes are bright as the noonday."

"Are not midnight and noonday fair to thine eyes?" she asked.

"They are fair indeed, but thou art fairer."

"Then I am well content," she said.

"I know not thy name nor thy face, Eurydice," said he, "but my heart beats with thy heart as though we were not strangers."

"When two hearts beat together, Orpheus, they are strangers no more, whether they have known each other all their days or have met as thou and I have met. Long ago the fame of thee, and of thy singing, reached mine ears, but I hardened my heart against thee, and said, 'It is an idle rumour, and he is no better than other men before whose face I flee.' But now the gods have brought thy steps to the hollow cave where I dwell, and thou, by thy magic, hast drawn me to thy feet, so that I, who doubted thy power, must follow thee whithersoever thou wilt."

"Shall I sing thee a song, Eurydice—the song thou hast sown in my heart?"

"Yes, sing me that song," she answered.

So he struck the chords of his lyre and sang her the song that was born of her beauty. One by one the wild creatures stole back to the forest, for that song was not for them, and they two were left alone beneath the spreading boughs of the

beech-tree. As he sang, Eurydice crept closer to him, till her head rested on his knee and her long black hair fell in a cloud about his feet. As she drew nearer his voice grew lower, till it became but a whisper in her ear. Then he laid his lyre on the ground beside him and put his arms about her, and their hearts spoke to each other in the tongue that knows not sound nor words.

So it came to pass that Orpheus returned no more to dwell with Cheiron and his companions in the hollow cave below Pelion, but lived with Eurydice, his wife, in her cave in the heart of the forest. But he never forgot his boyhood's happy days, nor all that Cheiron had done for him. He would come often to see him and take counsel with him, and sing to the lads his magic song. For a few short years he lived a life the gods might envy, till the dark days came, when not even music could bring comfort to his heart. For one day, as he roamed with Eurydice through the dark forest, it chanced that she unwittingly trod upon a snake, and the creature turned upon her and pierced her white foot with its venomous fang. Like liquid fire the poison ran through her veins, and she lay faint and dying in his arms.

"O Eurydice," he cried, "Eurydice, open thine eyes and come back to me!"

For a moment the agony of his voice awoke her to life.

"Orpheus," she said, "beloved, this side of the river of death we can dwell together no more.

But love, my dear one, is stronger than death, and some day our love shall prevail, never again to be conquered."

When she had spoken her head sank down upon his breast, and her spirit fled away, to return no more. So he bore the fair image of his wife in his arms, and laid her in the depths of the cave that had been their home. Above her head he placed a great pine torch, and all the long night watches he sat with his arms about her and his cheek against her cheek; and his heart groaned within him with a grief too great for words. Ere the day dawned he kissed for the last time the lips that could speak to him never again, and laid back her head on a pillow of leaves and moss. Then he pulled down the earth and stones about the mouth of the cave, so that no one could find the opening, and left for evermore the home he had loved so well. Onward he walked in the grey light of dawn, little caring where he went, and struck the chords of his lyre to tell all the earth of his grief. The trees and the flowers bowed down their heads as they listened, the clouds of heaven dropped tears upon the ground, and the whole world mourned with him for the death of Eurydice his wife.

"Oh, sleep no more, ye woods and forests!" he sang, "sleep no more, but toss your arms in the sighing wind, and bow your heads beneath the sky that weeps with me. For Eurydice is dead. She is dead. No more shall her white

feet glance through the grass, nor the field-flowers shine in her hair. But, like last year's snow, she is melted away, and my heart is desolate without her. Oh! why may the dried grass grow green again, but my love must be dead for ever? O ye woods and forests, sleep no more, but awake and mourn with me. For Eurydice is dead; she is dead, dead, dead!"

So he wandered, making his moan and wringing the hearts of all who heard him, with the sorrow of his singing. And when he could find no comfort upon earth he bethought him of the words of his wife:

"This side of the river of death we can dwell together no more. But love, my dear one, is stronger than death, and some day our love shall prevail, never again to be conquered."

He pondered the words in his heart, and wondered what she might mean

"If love is stronger than death," he thought, "then my love can win her back. If I can charm the hearts of all living things with the magic of my song, I may charm, too, the souls of the dead and of their pitiless king, so that he shall give me back Eurydice, my wife. I will go down to the dark halls of Hades, and bring her up to the fair earth once more."

When hope was thus born anew in his heart he grew brave for any venture, and pressed forward on his way till he came to the place men called the mouth of Hades. Nothing daunted by the tales

of horror they told him, he entered the fearsome cave, which led deep down into the bowels of the earth, where noisome vapours choked the breath in his throat, and dark forms crouched in his path and fled shrieking before him, till at last he stood by the shores of the ninefold Styx, that winds about the realms of the dead. Then he shouted aloud to Charon, the ferryman, to row him across in his boat. When the old man heard his voice, he stopped midway across the stream.

"Who is it that calls me in the voice of the living?" he asked.

"It is Orpheus," he answered. "I am come to fetch back Eurydice, my wife."

But the old man laughed, and his laugh cut the heart of Orpheus like a knife.

"O beardless innocent," he said, "who gave thee power over life and death? I tell thee that many have stood by the shores of this stream and entreated me to take them across, that they might bring their dear ones back with them. But no living soul shall sit in my boat, nor shall the dead, who have sat in it once, ever return to sit in it again. Go back to the earth, young man, and when thy time has come, thou, too, shall sit in my boat, never fear."

"That time has come, Charon," he said, "and I shall sit in thy boat this day."

Raising his lyre, he struck the chords, and his love taught him the tune and the words to sing.

Steadfastly he gazed at Charon, and the magic of his singing drew the old man towards him as surely as though the rope of the boat were in his hands. Without ceasing his song, he took his place in the stern, and in time to the music Charon dipped his oars in the stream, so that the boat swung over the river as it had never swung before. As it stranded in the shallow water, Orpheus leaped lightly to shore.

"Farewell for the present, Charon," he cried; "we shall meet again ere long."

He hastened on his way, playing and singing his magic song. Resting on his pole, the old man looked after him with wonder in his heart, and shaded his eyes with his hand. For a ray of the sun seemed to shine for a moment in that cold grey land as Orpheus passed by. The pale flowers of hell tossed their heads to and fro, as though the west wind played through their leaves, and their colour and their scent came back to them once more. With a sigh, Charon breathed in the perfume from the air, and tossed back the grey locks from his brow and straightened his drooping shoulders.

"It is long since I smelt the fresh smell of the earth," he muttered. "Who is this young god, who can bring light to the darkness and life to the realms of the dead?"

So till Orpheus passed out of sight and the sound of his singing grew faint in the distance Charon stood looking after him, and then with

a sigh he sat down in his boat and bent to his oars once more.

And Orpheus went on his way, with hope beating high in his heart, till he came to the portals of the palace of Death. On the threshold lay Cerberus, the three-headed hound of hell, who night and day kept watch beside the gate to see that no one passed in save those who had died upon earth, and that those who had passed him once should pass him never again. When he heard Orpheus coming, he sprang to his feet and snarled and growled and bared his sharp white fangs; but as the strains of music grew clearer he sank silent to the ground, and stretched his three great heads between his paws. Orpheus, as he passed by, bent down and stroked him, and the fierce beast licked his hands. So did he enter into the gates of Death, and passed through the shadowy halls, till he stood before the throne of Pluto, the king. A dim and awful form did he sit, wrapped about in darkness and mist, and on his right hand sat Persephone, his wife, whom he stole from the meadows of Sicily. When he saw Orpheus his eyes gleamed like the gleam of cold steel, and he stretched forth his gaunt right arm towards him.

"What dost thou here, Orpheus?" he asked.

"I am come to ask thee a boon, O king," he answered.

"There be many that ask me a boon," said Pluto, "but none that receive it."

"Yet none have stood before thee in the flesh, as I do, O king, to ask their boon."

"Because thou hast trespassed unlawfully on my domain, dost thou think I will grant thee thy boon?"

"Nay; but because my grief is so great that I have dared what none have dared before me, I pray thee to hear me."

Without waiting for an answer, he struck his lyre and sang to them the story of his life, and of how he had loved and lost Eurydice. The eyes of the pale queen brightened when she heard him, and the colour came back to her cheeks, as the song brought back to her mind the days of her girlhood and the sunlit meadows of Sicily. Then a great pity filled her heart for Eurydice, who had left the green earth for ever, and might not return, as she herself did, in the spring-time, living only the dark winter months below. As Orpheus ceased his song, she laid her hand upon her husband's.

"My lord," she said, "grant his boon, I pray thee. He is brave and true-hearted, and he sings as no man has ever sung before."

But the stern king sat with his head upon his hand and eyes cast down, deep in thought. At length he spoke, and his voice was soft and kind.

"Orpheus," he said, "thou hast touched my heart with thy singing. Yet it lies not with me to grant thee thy boon."

"But if the queen, thy wife, may return to the

earth in the spring-time, may not Eurydice, too, come back at thy command?" asked Orpheus.

"The ways of the gods are not the ways of mortals, Orpheus; they walk by paths you may not tread. Yet, though I have no power to give thee back Eurydice, thou mayest win her thyself if thou hast the strength."

"How may that be?" cried Orpheus. "For the sake of Eurydice I have strength for any venture."

"No strength of the flesh can win her, Orpheus, but the strength of a faith unflinching. I will send for her, and when thou seest her stand within the hall, holding out her hands towards thee, thou must harden thy heart, and turn and flee before her by the way thou camest. For the love of thee she will follow, and she will entreat thee to look at her and give her thy hand over the stony way. But thou must neither look at her nor speak to her. One look, one word, will be thine undoing, and she must vanish from thine eyes for ever. The spell of thy song still rests upon the guardians of my kingdom, and they will let thee and thy wife pass by. But think not by word nor deed to help her. Alone she passed from life to death, and alone she must pass back from death to life. Her love and thy faith can be the only bond between you. Hast thou the strength for this?"

"My lord," cried Orpheus, "'tis but a small thing to ask of a love like mine."

"It will be harder than thou thinkest," the king replied. "Nevertheless, I will call Eurydice."

He signed to a messenger to fetch her. In a few moments he returned, and behind him came Eurydice from the garden of Death. The dank dew hung heavy about her, and she walked with her eyes upon the ground, while her long black hair hid the paleness of her face. Thus did she come into the centre of the hall, and, not speaking or moving, Orpheus gazed upon her till she raised her eyes and saw him. With a cry she sprang towards him.

“Orpheus!” she said.

But, remembering the words of the king, he turned and fled before her through the misty halls and out by the great gate, where Cerberus lay tamed with his heads between his paws. And he tried to shut his ears to her pleading as they sped across the plain, but every word that she said cut his heart like a stab, and more than once he almost turned to answer her, so piteous was her cry.

“Oh, Orpheus, what have I done? Why dost thou flee from me? Oh, give me one word, one look, to say thou lov’st me still.”

But he remained firm in his resolve, and sat himself in Charon’s boat, and steeled his heart, whilst she sat beside him, but could not touch him. For he was a living soul, and she was a shade, and might not touch him if she would. But still she pleaded with him.

“O Orpheus, my heart is starving for one look, one word. I know thou lovest me, but oh! to see thine eyes tell me so and hear thy lips say it.”

He longed to turn and clasp her in his arms, and tell her how he loved her better than life. But still he refrained, and hugged his lyre close to his breast in his agony; and as soon as the boat touched the shore he leapt out and hastened up the steep, dark path, whilst the sweat stood out in drops upon his brow, so hard was the way and so stifling the air. Behind him followed Eurydice, and if the way was hard for him, for her it was ten times harder. She had no strength for words, and only by her sobs did Orpheus know she was following still. So they went on, till at length the air grew pure and fresh, and the daylight shone before them at the mouth of the cave. With eager steps Orpheus pressed forward, longing for the moment when he might clasp his wife in his arms and speak to her once more. But as the way grew easier for him, it grew harder for Eurydice; since no one may pass from death to life without sore travail and pain. So she struggled and stumbled after him, and her heart gave way within her as she felt she could follow no farther.

“Orpheus!” she cried in her despair, “thy hand.”

Ere reason could restrain him, his heart had answered her sudden cry, and he turned and held out his arms to help her. All too late he knew his folly. For even as he was about to hold her she slipped away, and as smoke is borne away on the wings of the wind, so was she borne away, helpless and lifeless, to the realms of the dead, and her voice floated back like the echo of a dream.

“Farewell, Orpheus. Alas! Alas! farewell!”

So for the second time did he lose Eurydice; and if his grief was great before, it was ten times greater now. For as the cup of joy had touched his lips it had slipped from his hand and broken, and he knew that the chance the gods had given him once they would give him never again, but that all his life long he must dwell in loneliness without Eurydice his wife. Blindly he went forward with his lyre beneath his arm. The strings hung broken and lifeless, for the rocks and thorns had torn them as he passed on his way up from Hades. But he heeded not nor made any effort to mend them, for the strings of his heart hung broken too, and the music in his soul was dead. In black despair he wandered on, and the sunshine to his eyes was darkness, and the fair forms of earth were sadder than the phantoms of Hades had seemed to him while hope still beat in his breast. As a colt that has wandered far by unknown paths returns at last surely to his homestead, so did his feet carry him back to Pelion and the dear home of his boyhood. Not till he stood in the path which led up to the cave did he know where he had come; but when he saw the mouth of the cave before him his eyes were opened once more, and a faint joy stole into his heart as he went on and sat down on a stone outside. All was silent and deserted, and he sat for a while alone with his own sad thoughts, till he felt a touch upon his shoulder, and looked

up into the face of Cheiron standing beside him.

"O my master!" he cried.

"My son, thou hast suffered," said Cheiron.

"I have been down into Hades, Cheiron," he answered.

"My child," said Cheiron, "I know it all."

He gazed upon him, his great mild eyes full of pity, and Orpheus gazed back at him, and knew that he understood, though how he had learnt his tale he could not tell. His heart drew comfort from the sympathy that understood without words, and was softened as the parched earth is softened by rain, so that he took Cheiron's hands between his, and bowed his head upon them, and wept.

Thus it came to pass that he returned to his boyhood's home, and dwelt once more with Cheiron and his lads beneath the shade of snow-capped Pelion. In time the bitterness of his grief was purged away, and he remembered Eurydice as something bright and fair that had been woven into the web of his life while yet it was young, and which could never be taken away. As he listened again to the old songs which Cheiron had sung to him and his comrades when they were lads, the fire and the eagerness of his youth were born once more within him. When he saw the elder ones go forth into the world and little lads brought up to take their place with Cheiron, he felt how life stands ever beckoning and calling to those in whose veins the blood of gods and heroes runs, and they go forth

to rule and to serve, to fight and to labour, in answer to the call which the foolish do not hear. So one morning he took his lyre, which for many a long day had lain silent, and putting fresh strings for the ones that were broken, he passed his fingers lovingly over them as of old. And the spirit of music sprang to life once more in his heart, as the flowers spring to life when the winter is past, so that once again he could charm every living thing by the magic of his song.

When Cheiron knew that his power had come back to him he was glad.

"Orpheus," he said, "thou hast conquered. A weaker man than thou art would have lain crushed beneath the foot of adversity. But those who bravely rise again are stronger than before."

"Master," he said, "when I saw the broken strings of my lyre and felt my voice choked within me, I said, 'With the breaking of this string the music dies and becomes a voiceless echo of the past, just as now Eurydice is a shade in the shadowy land while her body is dust upon earth,' and lo! ere the strings were mended or the voice grew strong again, the soul of song lived once more in my heart, as on the day when first my mother Calliope breathed her spirit upon me. If music may live without sound or words, may not the soul live too without bones and flesh? This is a mystery, and I must seek the wide world for an answer."

And Cheiron smiled upon him.

"It is good to seek," said he, "though thou find no answer in the end."

"Yet will I find an answer," said Orpheus.

So when the call of Jason came soon after, for him to sail with the heroes in the good ship *Argo* for the finding of the Golden Fleece, and to be their minstrel on the stormy seas, he went down right gladly to Iolchos. At the sound of his song the gallant ship leapt over the stones and into the sea like a charger ready for battle, though before she had been too heavy to move. So he sailed with the heroes on their perilous venture, filling their hearts with courage and hope, and took them safely through many a danger by the magic of his song. But though many had set out, there were few that returned, and he saw the wreck of many a promising life on that terrible voyage, but found no answer to his quest. He bowed his head in reverence to the memory of those who, for the sake of adventure and honour and a noble name, had poured forth their lives like water on a thirsty soil, knowing full well when they set forth that the danger would be for all, but the prize and the dear home-coming for few.

So, as soon as might be, he set forth again to wander the wide world alone with his lyre. Some say he went to Egypt, others say to Crete, but wherever he went he found at last the answer to his quest. For he found the great god Dionysos, the god of many names—Bromios, Bacchos, Zagreus—who fills men's minds with inspiration and divine

madness, so that they become one with him and with the life that lives for ever behind the forms of things that die. He ate of the flesh of the mystic bull, which is the god himself, and to the sound of his lyre the Mænads danced over the mountains and through untrodden woods, and held to their breasts young lions, and cubs of the untamed wolf. Far away from towns and cities, where custom and language raise barriers between man and man, on the breast of the untouched earth they danced their mystic dance, and became one with Bacchos and with all things that have life in the present, or have lived in the past. There Orpheus found Eurydice again in the communion of soul with soul, and learnt what she had meant when she said, "Some day our love shall prevail, never again to be conquered." So it came to pass that he became the priest of Bacchos, the mystic god, who is one with Life and Love. And he wrote upon tablets the rule of life, by which, through purity and initiation, men may become one with the god, and when they have been purified by birth and re-birth in many diverse forms, they may win, because they are one with him, the immortal life that changeth not, like the life of the stars in heaven.

The tale goes of Orpheus that at last he came to Thrace and the wild mountain lands that lie to the north of Greece. Then he tamed the fierce hill tribes with the magic of his song, and lived a life of abstinence and purity and ecstasy of the

soul. But the followers of Dionysos who dwelt in those parts looked on him askance; for whereas they worshipped the god with shedding of blood and rending of goats, in the madness that is born of wine, the ecstasy of his worship was born of music and beauty, and he would have no part nor lot in their wild revels. And because there is no hate that is greater than the hate of those who worship one god in divers way, there came a day when the mad frenzy of the Mænads was turned against Orpheus himself. As he sat looking forth on the sunrise and singing as he touched his lyre, the raving band came up behind him, full of madness and of wine. And they tore him limb from limb in their frenzy, as they had torn the wild goats before, and cast his head into the Hebrus, thinking to silence his singing for ever. But his head floated on the waves of the ebbing stream, fair and fresh as in life, singing as it floated its magic enchanting song. Gently the river bore it along and down to the sea, and the blue sea waves kissed it and passed it from one to the other, till at last they cast it up, still singing, on the shores of the Lesbian Isle. There the Muses came and buried it, and made of its tomb a sacred shrine, where for many a long year, men came from far and wide to worship and consult the oracle. About that shrine the nightingales sang more sweetly than in any other spot on earth, for they learnt their song from the lips of Orpheus himself. And men bound

themselves in a holy brotherhood which they called by his name, and lived by the rules he had written on his tablets. Some of those who pretended to follow him were charlatans and rogues, and brought dishonour and ridicule upon his name, while others kept the letter without the spirit of his law; but among them were those of a pure and blameless life, who kept his doctrines, and handed them down from generation to generation, till in time they became the foundation-stones of the great philosophies of Pythagoras and Plato.

Thus did Orpheus live and die, and pointed out to men the path to immortality by purity and abstinence and ecstasy of the soul. There were many of old who hated his doctrine, and many who hate it now; and, indeed, it is not one by which every man can live. But there are those to whom it brings peace and joy, though they call it by other names than his; and these are the Bacchoi, the initiated, who have seen the inward light, and their souls are at peace.

NOTES

P. 4, l. 4. *sobeit*, if so it be that thy lord come not, *i.e.* unless thy lord come

P. 18, l. 21. the *pæan* song, a solemn song for several voices, sung at a banquet between the actual meal and the drinking that followed. Before the drinking began wine was poured three times upon the ground for the gods to drink; and the third pouring, or *libation*, was in honour of Zeus the Saviour.

P. 71, l. 15 *Cheiron*. The name is probably connected with *cheir*, the Greek word for 'hand.' So surgeon (a contraction of *chirurgæon*) means one who cures diseases by operating upon them with the hand.

P. 73, l. 29. *mystics*, men who believe that God has revealed to them deeper mysteries than are understood by ordinary men, that they are granted direct intercourse with the powers of the supernatural world. This deeper kind of religion in Greece—with its teaching about a life after death, about sin and the need for purification, and the possibility of attaining that purification by the performance of mysterious rites—was connected with the name of Orpheus, who was supposed to have been born in Thrace and to have introduced there the mystical teaching which afterwards spread over Greece.

P. 94, l. 5. *Mænads*, the votaries of the god Bacchos or Dionysos. Their actions and gestures during the performance of their rites were like those of mad women

P. 95, l. 14. This story of the fate of Orpheus was a favourite with Milton. See *Lycidas*.

“What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore,
The Muse herself, for her enchanting son,
When, by the rout that made the hideous roar,
His gory visage down the stream was sent,
Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore?”

Cp. *Paradise Lost*, Bk. vii. 32-38

P. 96. l. 11. **Pythagoras**, a Greek philosopher of the sixth century B. C., who settled at Croton, a Greek town in the south of Italy, and there founded a brotherhood. His best known doctrine is the transmigration of souls.

Plato, a disciple of Socrates, and himself the greatest of Greek philosophers; lived in Athens in the early part of the fourth century B. C.

P. 96, l. 20. There is an old Greek proverb, quoted by Plato, "Many are the wand-bearers [those who help in the processions], but few are the Bacchoi [the initiated]." This is like the saying in the Gospels—"Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew xxii. 14).

SUBJECTS FOR SHORT COMPOSITIONS

(The numbers in brackets refer to the pages.)

I. THE SACRIFICE OF ALCESTIS.

1. What do you know of the Greek Games?
2. Describe a Greek chariot-race
3. The night before the day fixed for Alcestis' death Admetus dreams that Apollo appears and upbraids him with his base-ness. Describe the dream.
4. What do you think of the characters of Admetus and Alcestis?
5. Compare Alcestis with any favourite heroine from stories or from history.
6. What do you think of the characters of Apollo and Hercules?
7. Write a description of the Fates in your own words.
8. Tell in verse how Sleep came to Alcestis and passed her by (22-23).
9. Put into verse Alcestis' farewell speech (48).
10. "This pride it was that made him do a mean thing" (36). Show that there is a right and a wrong kind of Pride, and try to explain the difference between them.
11. Explain the words: blood-guiltiness (8), tunic (8), prelude (9), vibrates (9), doublet (10), morbid (14), adversary (24), lists (41), circlet (49), underworld (57), colonnade (58).
12. Write sentences containing the following words so used as to show their meaning: presumptuous (33), familiar (35), by-word (43), dirge (49), hypocrisy (55), pompous (55), ambush (57), fruitless (59).

II. THE CURSE OF ECHO.

13. Write a story of your own about an Echo.
14. Write a short poem on "Echo"
15. Do you know any other stories of people being changed into flowers or trees?

III. THE DIVINE MUSICIAN.

16. "But his answer was a dark saying to them" (77). What was this answer of Orpheus, and what did he mean by it?

17. Write a poem about the boy Orpheus on the mountain (74).

18. Write a poem on "Orpheus comes into the realms of the dead" (85). [Read, if you like, Matthew Arnold's poem on "Balder Dead."]

19. Explain, with reference to the context:

(a) "Till this day I have been blind."

(b) "No living soul shall sit in my boat."

(c) "There be many that ask me a boon."

20. Jason persuades Orpheus to join in the quest of the Golden Fleece (93). Describe the scene.

21. Explain the words: spellbound (77), portal (85), inspiration (93), initiation (94), ecstasy (94), charlatan (96).

22. Write sentences containing the following words so used as to show their meaning: devices (72), venture (93), adversity (92), unwittingly (80).

HELPS TO FURTHER STUDY.

1. The *Alcestis* of Euripides, on which the first story is based, may be read in Robert Browning's beautiful 'transcript,' contained in *Balaustion's Adventure*. There is a fine description of a Greek chariot-race in the *Electra* of Sophocles (translation by Campbell in *The World's Classics*).

2. The story of Orpheus and Eurydice is told with exquisite pathos by Virgil in his *Georgics*, Book IV.

3. For the story of Jason and the Argonauts, see Kingsley's *Heroes*, or William Morris's *Life and Death of Jason*.

4. For the story of Demeter and Persephone, read Tennyson's poem *Demeter*, or *Demeter a Mask*, by Robert Bridges.

5. For the Greek myths generally, consult any Classical Dictionary, or Guerber's *Myths of Greece and Rome* (Harrap).

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